

MINDS

REMASTERED EDITION

MINDS

DAVE SIM & GERHARD



DAVE SIM & GERHARD

CEREBUS
BOOK
10
AARDVARK
VANAHEIM
INC.

MINDS
DAVE SIM & GERHARD

CEREBUS

Volume

10



CEREBUS

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fax transmission

from Dave Sim at fax no.

to the attention of: Anyone reading
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CEREBUS trade

(I don't have e-mail and can only be contacted
by escargot mail at Box 1674 Stn. C Kitchener
Ontario, CANADA N2G 4R2)

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Sincere thanks to everyone who has devoted that most valuable of human commodities -- their time -- to reading my and Gerhard's work.

Dave Sim, creator, writer, co-artist

Gerhard does prints and commissions and can be contacted at gerhardart.com

MINDS

by

Dave Sim and Gerhard

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Dave's dedication:

**to Charles Dickens and Ebenezer Scrooge
Without Whom**

Gerhard's dedication:

to the memory of James Barton

Introduction:

It's very difficult to write an introduction to this, the fourth book of *Mothers and Daughters*, without giving away too much of the actual story. I had a specific intention for this fourth book, way, way back, when I was still working on *Church and State*. For the longest time, the final third of this very book was the furthest outpost in the Cerebus journey that I had marked clearly on my mental Cerebus map. It ties together many, if not most, of the loose ends which have been left dangling through Our Story Thus Far. It is difficult to write this introduction because I don't want to "give away" the crucial story point. So, let me just say that my conception of the story was carved in stone some time ago and that much of the writing — the tying-off-loose-ends part — was largely a challenge of distillation. And what a relief and a terror it was — putting down on the page the sequence of events and repercussions from way, way, way back in 1977, '78, and '79, answering the *who, what, where, when, and why's* I've been keeping secret for nearly twenty years.

It's not easy keeping a secret for twenty years, you know.

And then, having discharged my obligations in the area of tying off loose ends, I came at last to the point I thought I would *never* get to.

"Your turn."

And after that simple two-word dialogue balloon, it was time for complete improvisation. As difficult as it is to keep a secret for twenty years, it is at least (*at least*) as difficult to keep a secret from yourself for that long. I had no idea what Cerebus's dialogue would be from that point on. For close to ten years, I wouldn't let myself even *speculate* on it as I lived with the little gray bastard (hey, he's mine — I can say that) day in and day out. I had to trust that such an extended period of living with the title character of this large and strange experiment would make the improvisation go well, but I had no way of knowing. Disconcerting indeed, when the capstone to a 1,000-page sequence, and (in many ways) the capstone to the entire previous 4,000 pages, hinges on such a nebulous article of faith. Keeps me interested anyway.

I hope the exhilaration of the roller-coaster ride from "Your turn" to the end of this particular book communicates half of the genuine enjoyment I experienced putting it down on paper in words and pictures. Hell, even a quarter of the enjoyment means you'll be getting your money's worth (I reckon).

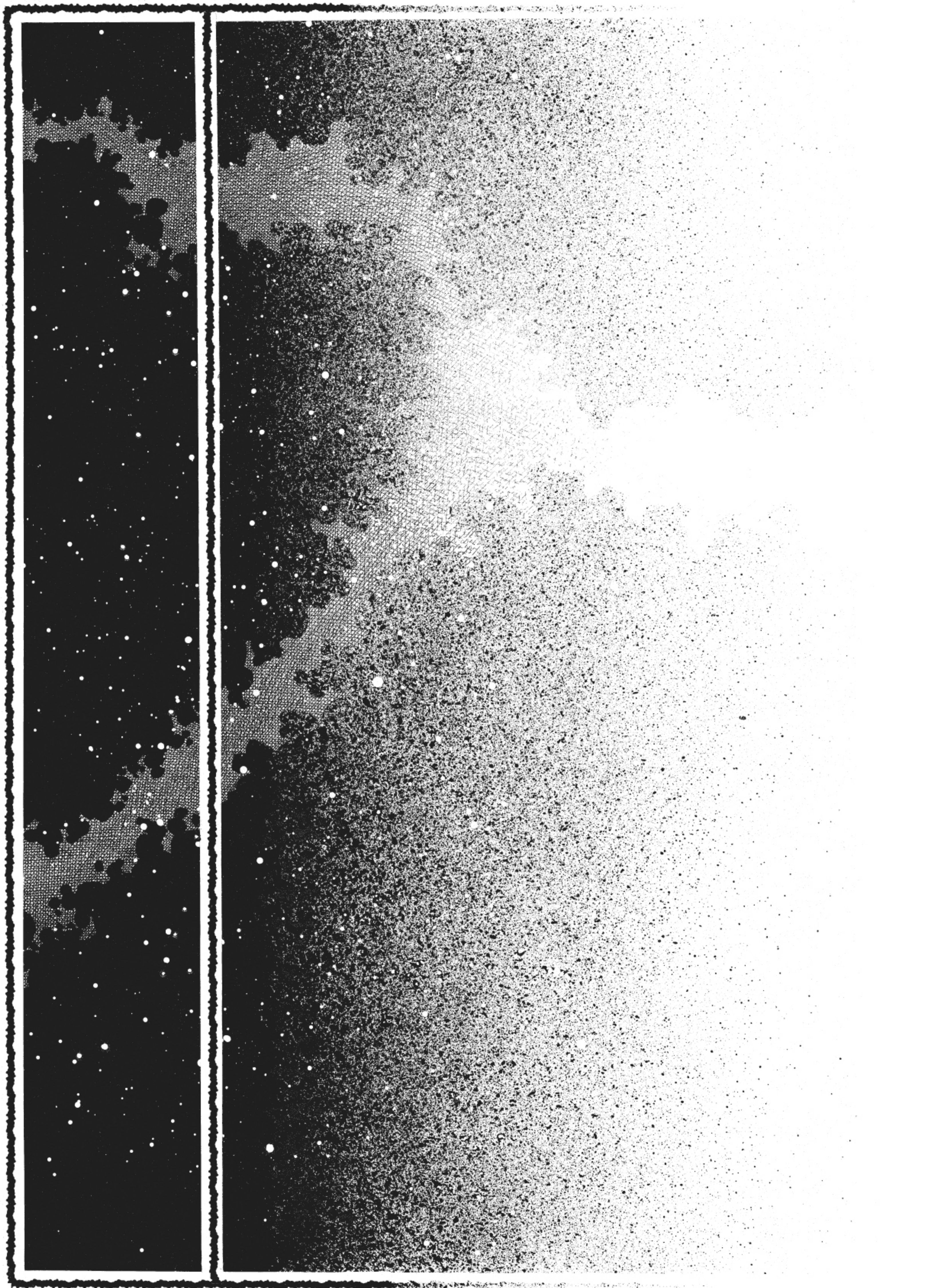
When you're done, I hope you'll agree.

Now, if you'll recall the end of *Reads*, Cerebus and Cirin had just hurtled past the Moon on a chunk of rock which also holds the Papal Throne from the now-demolished Eastern Church of Tarim. As we rejoin the unlikely duo . . .

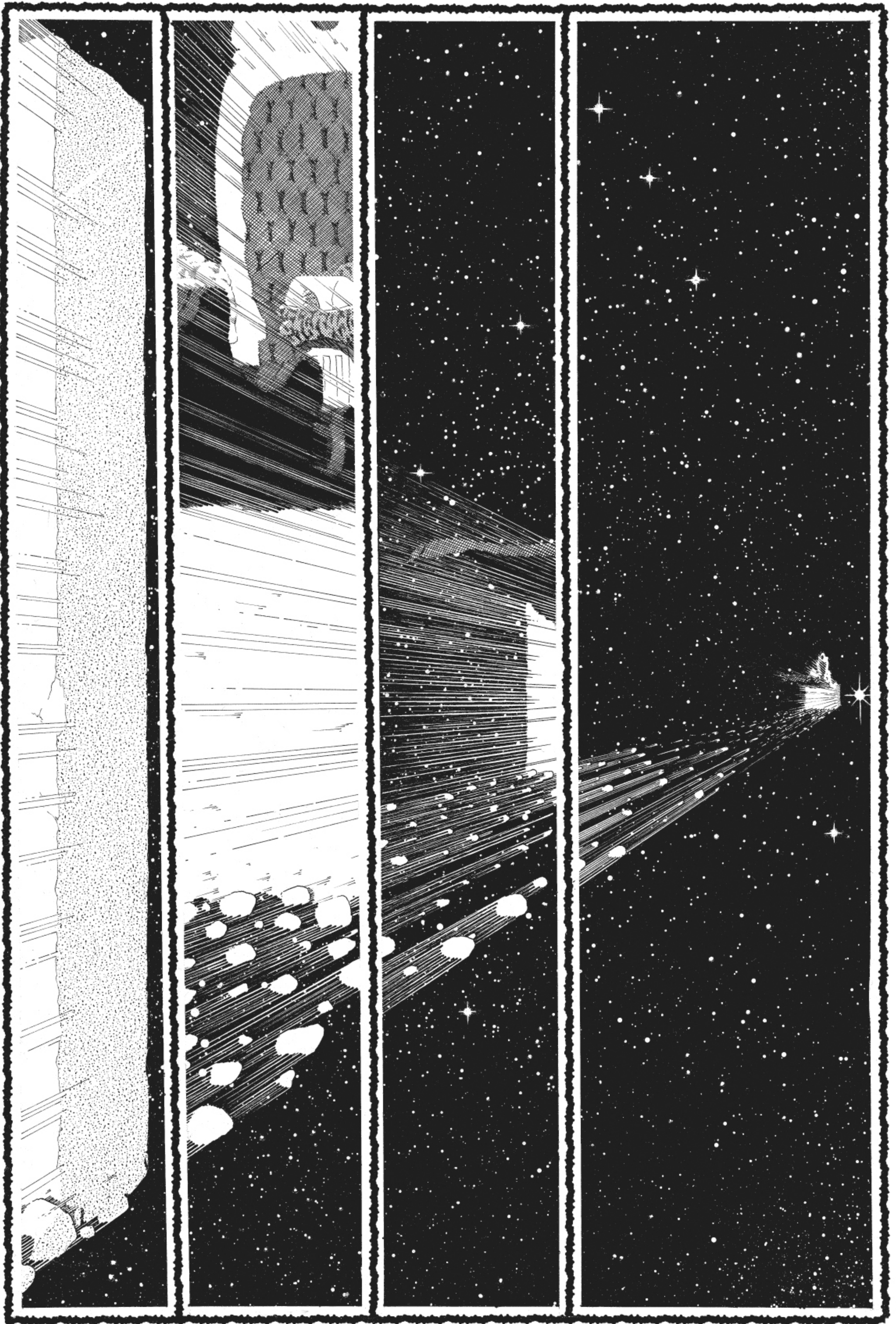
Dave Sim
Kitchener, Ontario
May 1, 1996

book four minds

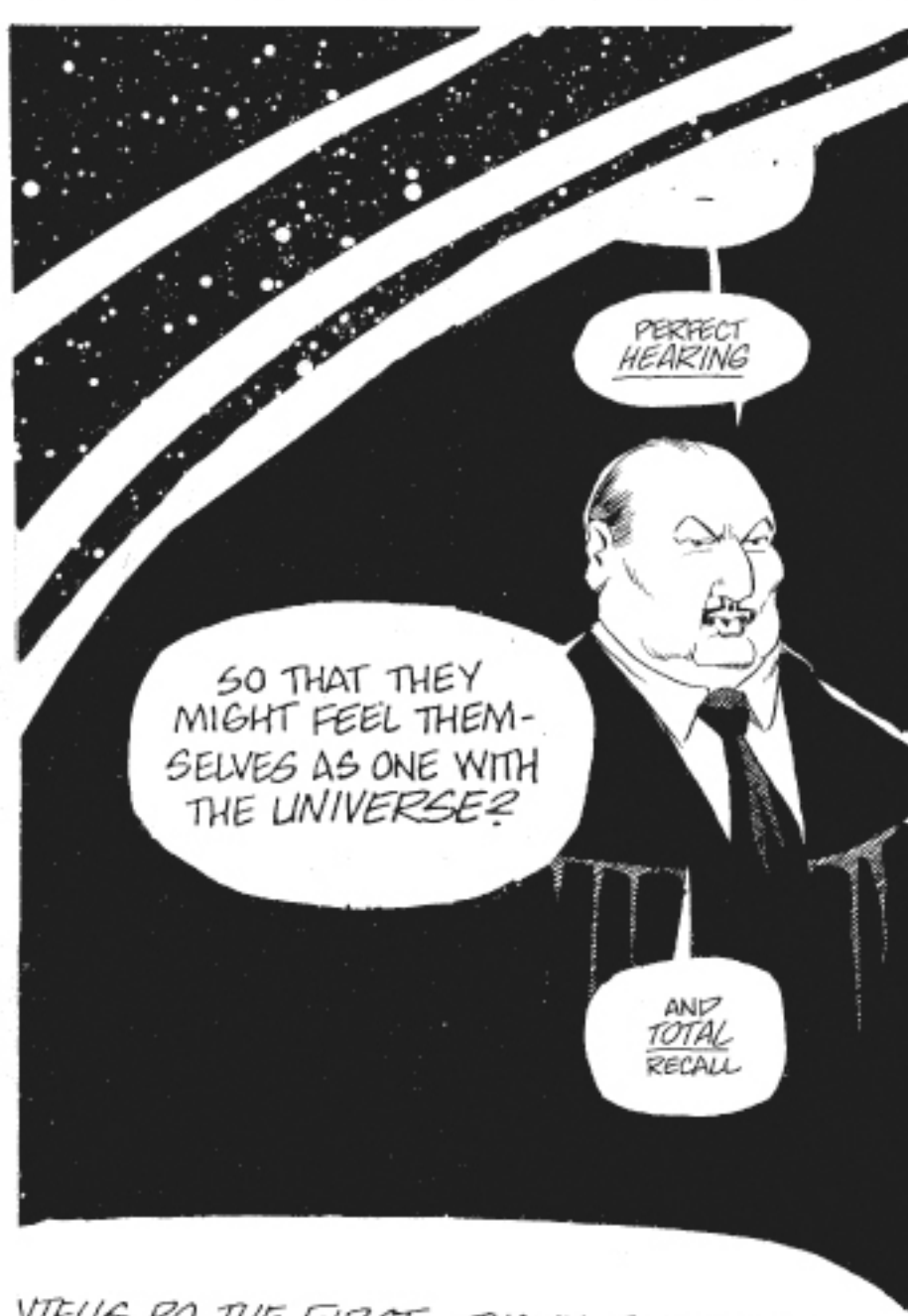












PERFECT
HEARING

SO THAT THEY
MIGHT FEEL THEM-
SELVES AS ONE WITH
THE UNIVERSE?

AND TOTAL
RECALL



I SEE
EVERYTHING
EVERYONE
DOES

I HEAR
EVERYTHING
EVERYONE
SAYS

AND I
NEVER
FORGET

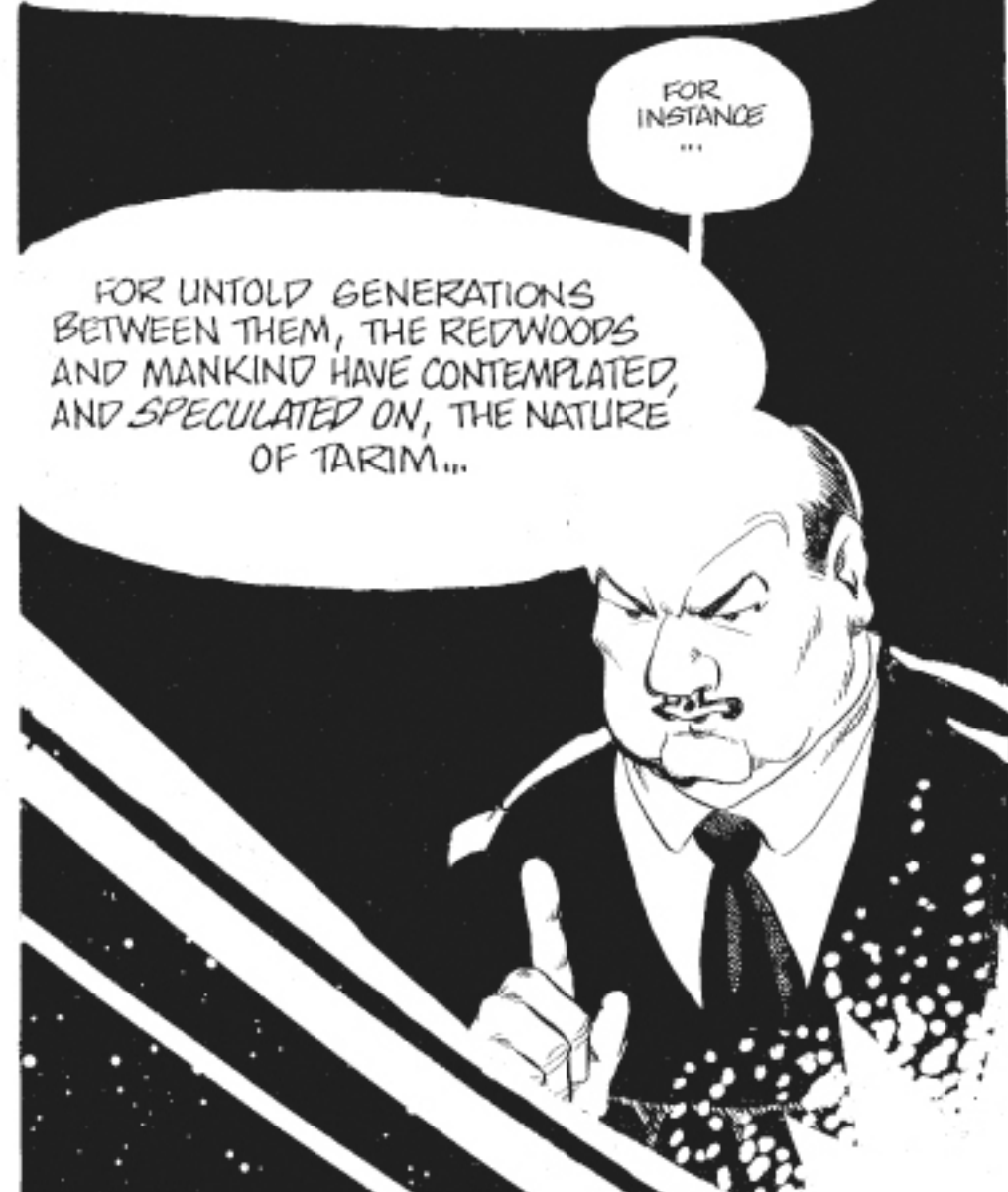


OVER THE
HUNDREDS
AND HUNDREDS
OF THOUSANDS
OF YEARS

CERTAIN
PATTERNS
HAVE
EMERGED

"...BUT AT THE CENTRE, THE HEART OF ALL,
WAS STILL A VIVID, INCANDESCENT QUIVERING
OF A WHITE MOON NOT QUITE DESTROYED, A
WHITE BODY OF FIRE WRITHING AND STRIVING
AND NOT EVEN NOW BROKEN OPEN, NOT YET
VIOLATED. IT SEEMED TO BE DRAWING ITSELF
TOGETHER WITH STRANGE, VIOLENT PANGS, IN
BLIND EFFORT. IT WAS GETTING STRONGER,
IT WAS REASSERTING ITSELF, THE INVIOLENT
MOON. AND THE RAYS WERE HASTENING IN IN
THIN LINES OF LIGHT, TO RETURN TO THE
STRENGTHENED MOON, THAT SHOOK UPON THE
WATER IN TRIUMPHANT REASSUMPTION."

VTEUS PO THE FIRST-- THANK GOD HE'S
LIVE TODAY -- BEGAN HIS MILITARY CAREER
TING YOUNG BOYS BARELY OUT OF ADOLESCENCE
THE HARSHTEST IMAGINABLE TRAINING
RAM TWENTY MILES WITHIN THE DISPUTED
JUNDARIES OF THE RED MARCHES...



FOR
INSTANCE

FOR UNTOLD GENERATIONS
BETWEEN THEM, THE REDWOODS
AND MANKIND HAVE CONTEMPLATED,
AND SPECULATED ON, THE NATURE
OF TARIM...



EACH TIME THAT LIFE
HAS DRAGGED ITSELF
FROM THE RUBBLE OF
LIFE'S PREVIOUS
INCARNATION

EACH
TIME

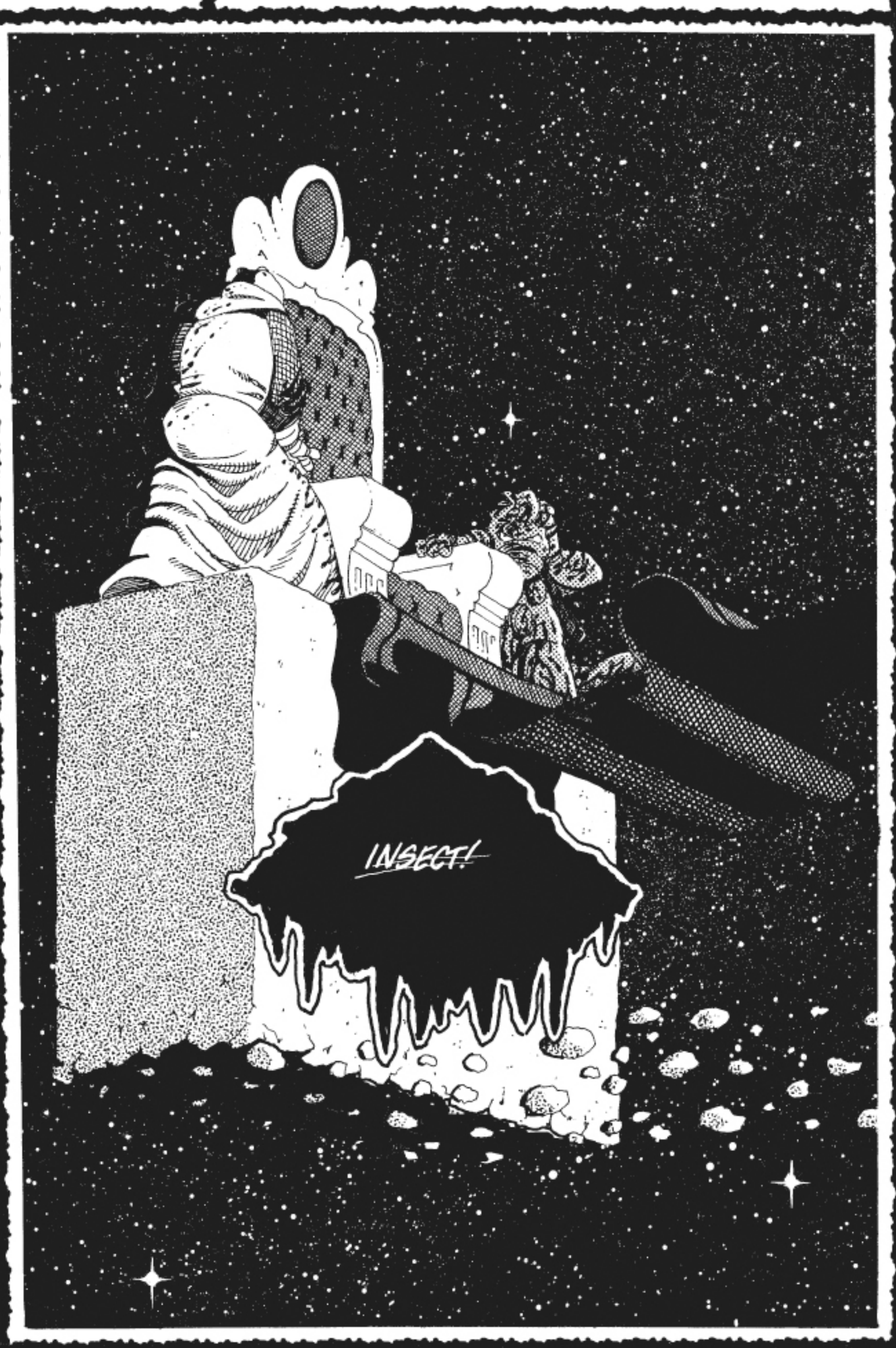


THAT LIFE HAS
REDISCOVERED
LANGUAGE
LIFE'S FIRST
WORDS HAVE
BEEN THE
SAME...

SO THEY MIGHT HAVE
A GREATER BOND WITH
THEIR FELLOW TREE
AND FELLOW MAN?

"...DIRECTLY ABOVE THE EXTENSIVE NETWORK
OF UNDERGROUND CITIES WHICH WERE
CONSTRUCTED AND HAVE BEEN OCCUPIED
BY THE PIG RACES FOR SEVERAL TH
YEARS SINCE THE SUDDEN AND RE-
UNTIMELY DEMISE OF THE BLA
EMPIRE..."





YOU'VE NEVER EVEN
HEARD
OF BELINUS
TWO-TONGUES --

**HAVE
YOU?**



NO.

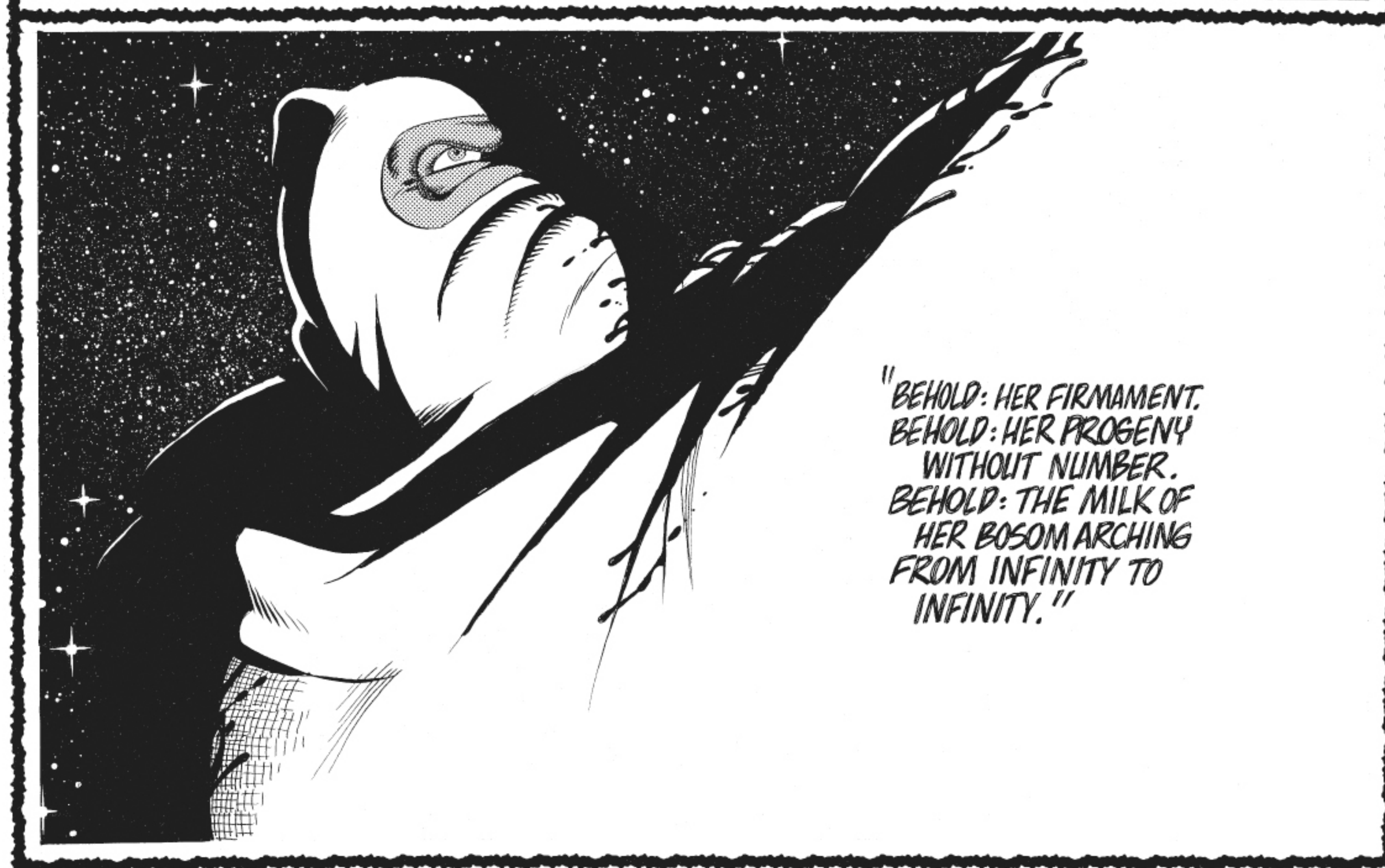
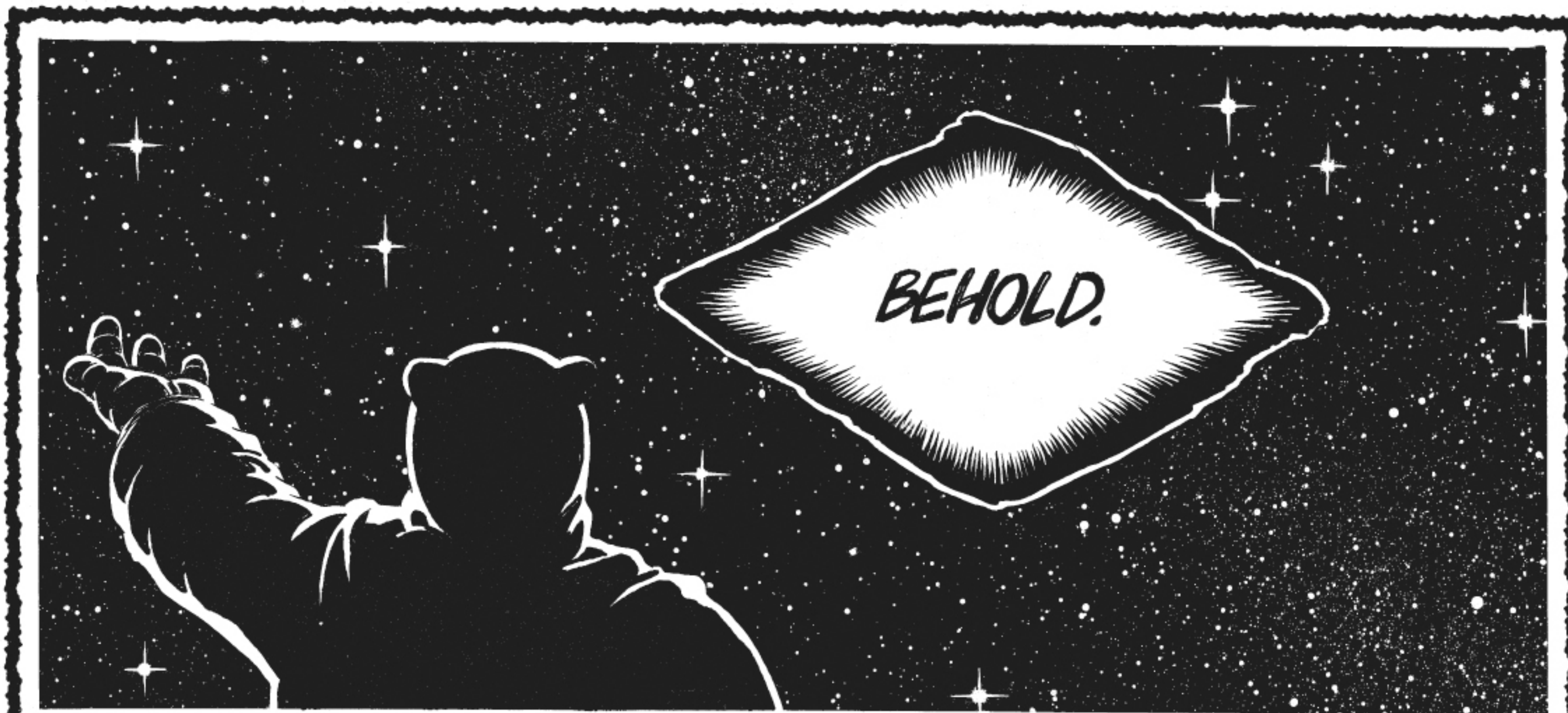
I DIDN'T
THINK
SO.

HE IS THE MALE DEITY--
THE ONE YOU CALL 'TARIM'.
IN ANCIENT TIMES HE ATTEMPTED
TO USURP THE THRONE OF
THE LIVING GODDESS--

AND WAS
BANISHED FOREVER
TO THE FURTHEST
EDGE OF HER
CELESTIAL
DOMAIN...







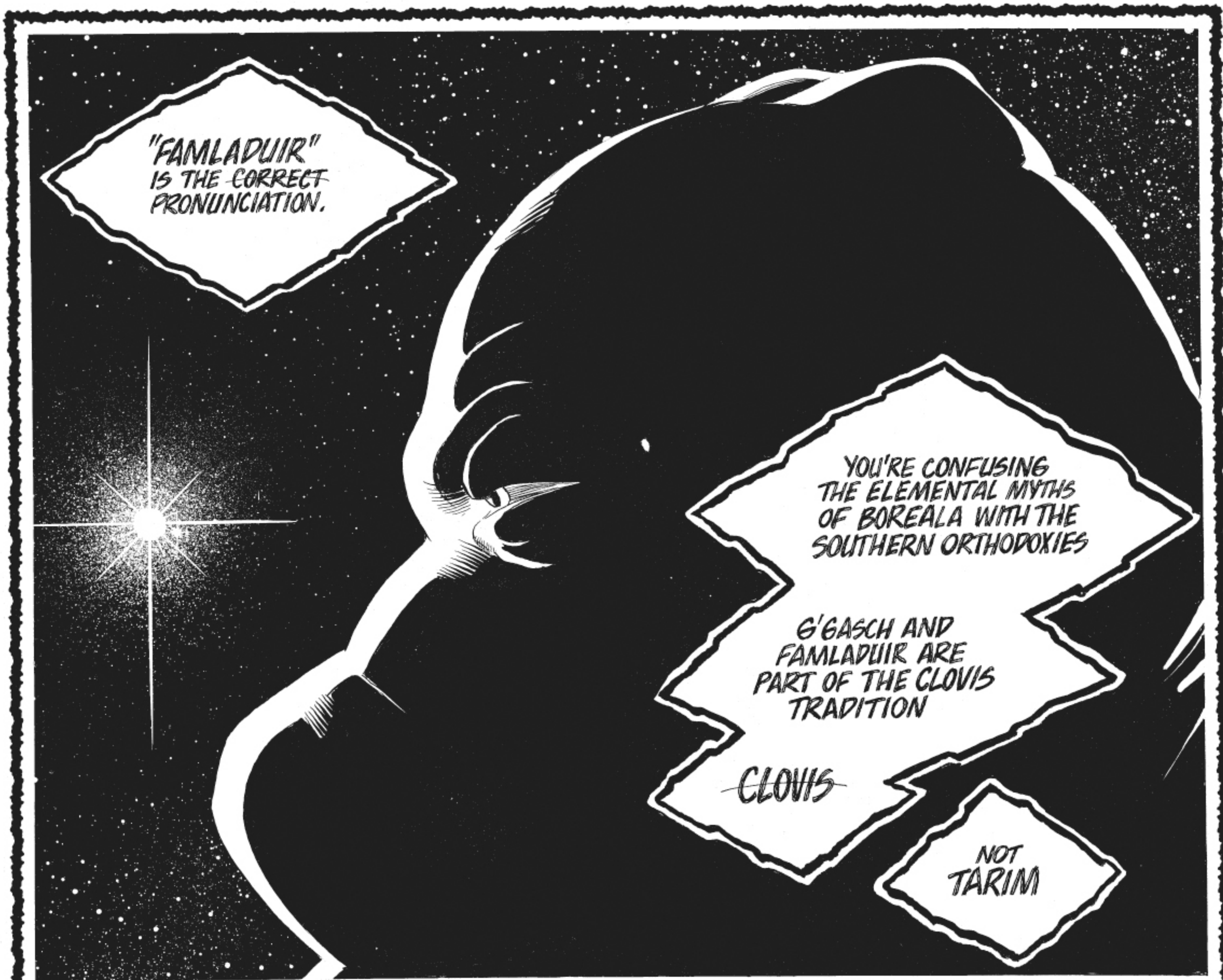
TARIM
IS GOING TO...
**BITE YOUR
TISOFF**
AND
UH



FEED THEM
TO HIS PET
WOLVES



G'GASCH AND
FALMADIR-BORN
FROM THE BLOOD OF
THE INFINITY SERPENT



"FAMLADUIR"
IS THE CORRECT
PRONUNCIATION.

YOU'RE CONFUSING
THE ELEMENTAL MYTHS
OF BOREALA WITH THE
SOUTHERN ORTHODOXIES

G'GASCH AND
FAMLADUIR ARE
PART OF THE CLOVIS
TRADITION

CLOVIS

NOT
TARIM



SAME
THING.



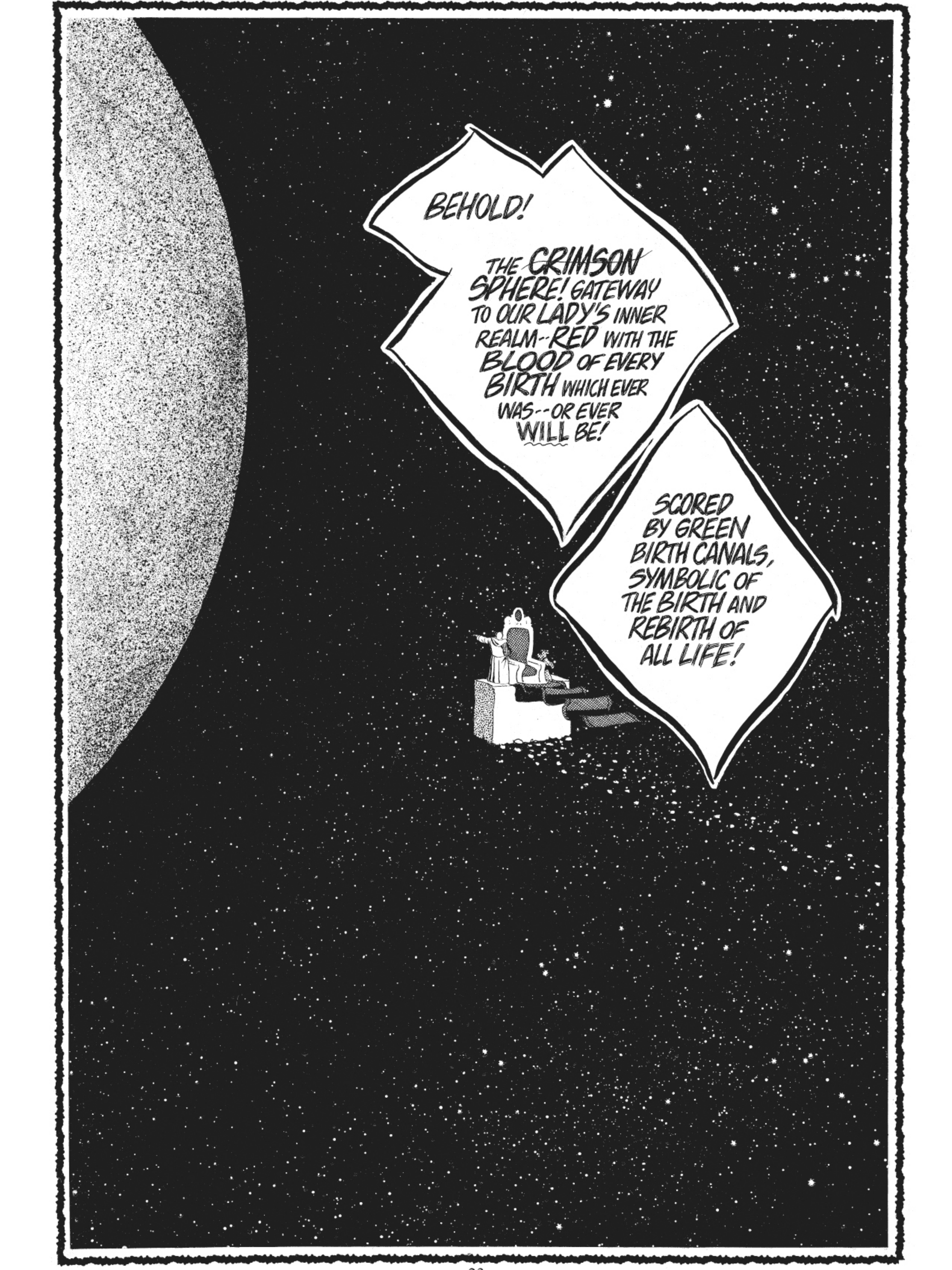
YOU CAN'T BE **SERIOUS**.
CLOVIS IS A CONSTRUCT OF
TARIMITE MISSIONARIES -- A
MERGING OF THE BOREALAN
THUNDER-GOD, **BAAN**, AND THE
TARIMITE STAR-SON
MYTHOLOGY...



OH, **YEAH?** WELL, WHY
DON'T YOU **TELL** HIM THAT
WHILE HE'S **WINDING** YOUR
ENTRAILS AROUND THE
WHEELS OF HIS **WAR**
CHARIOT?!





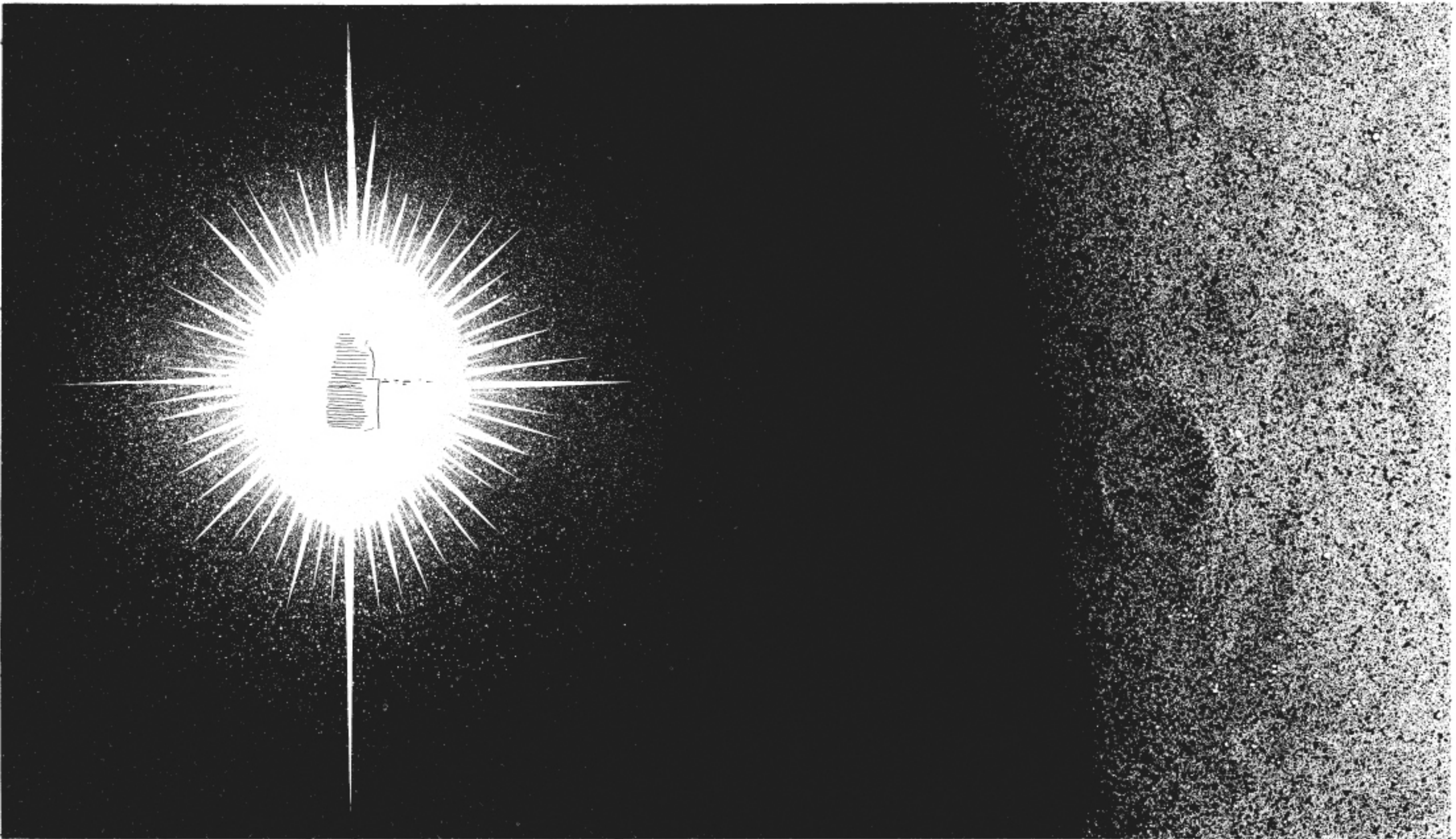
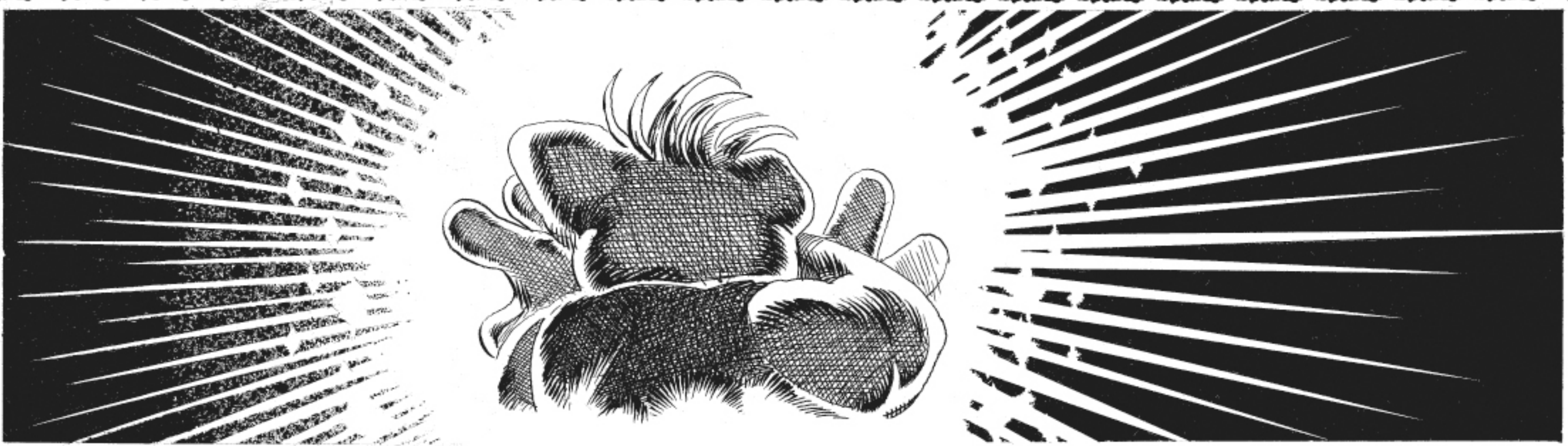
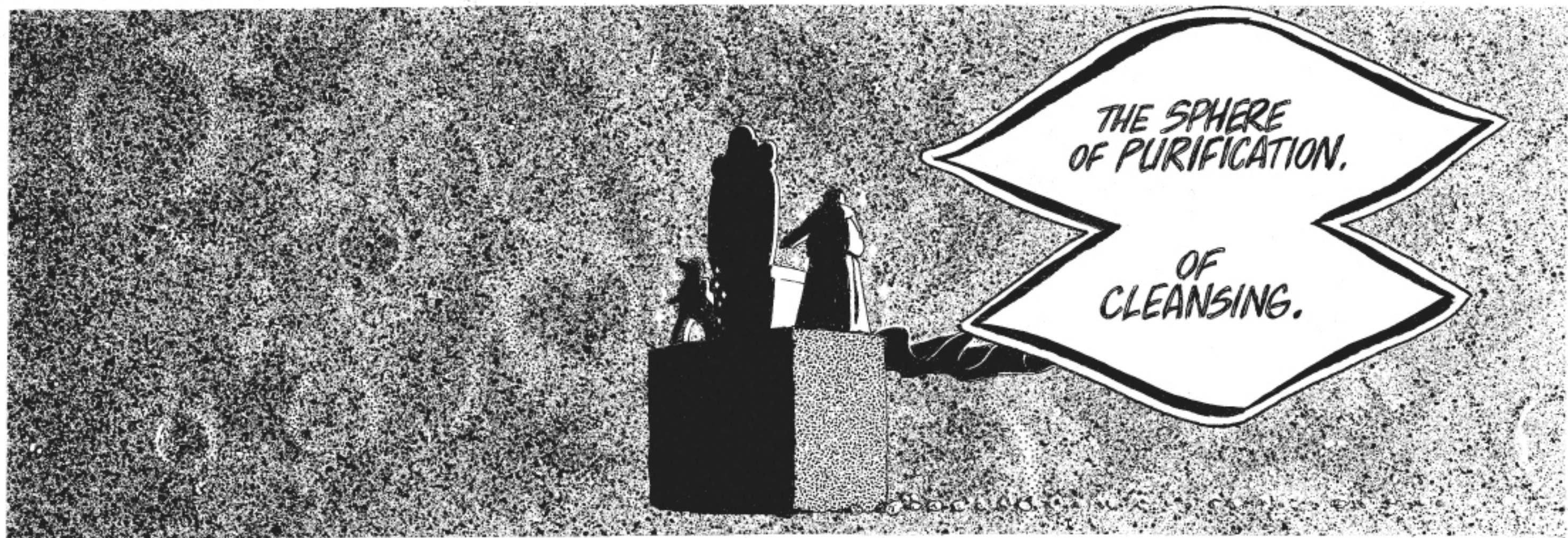


BEHOLD!

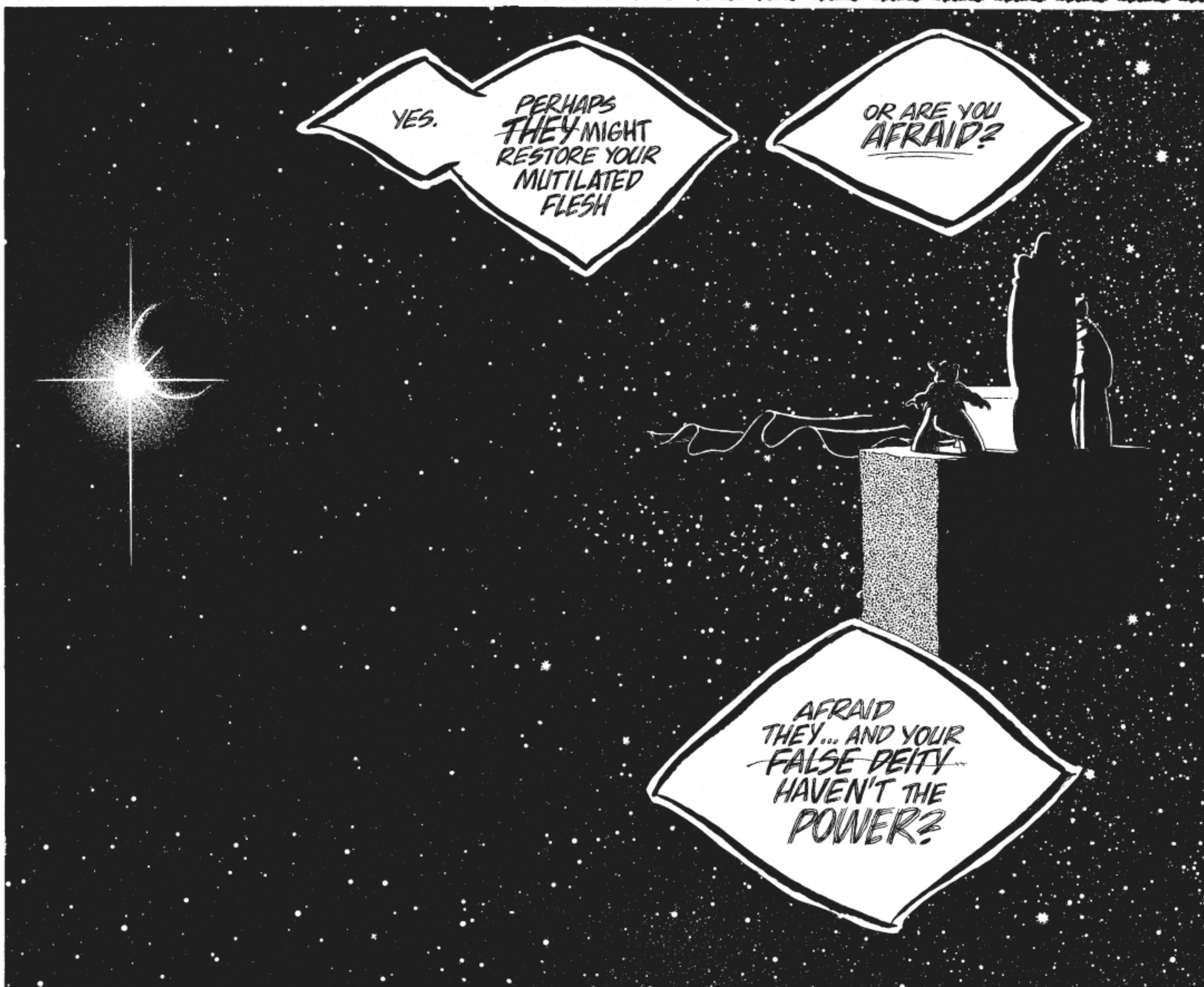
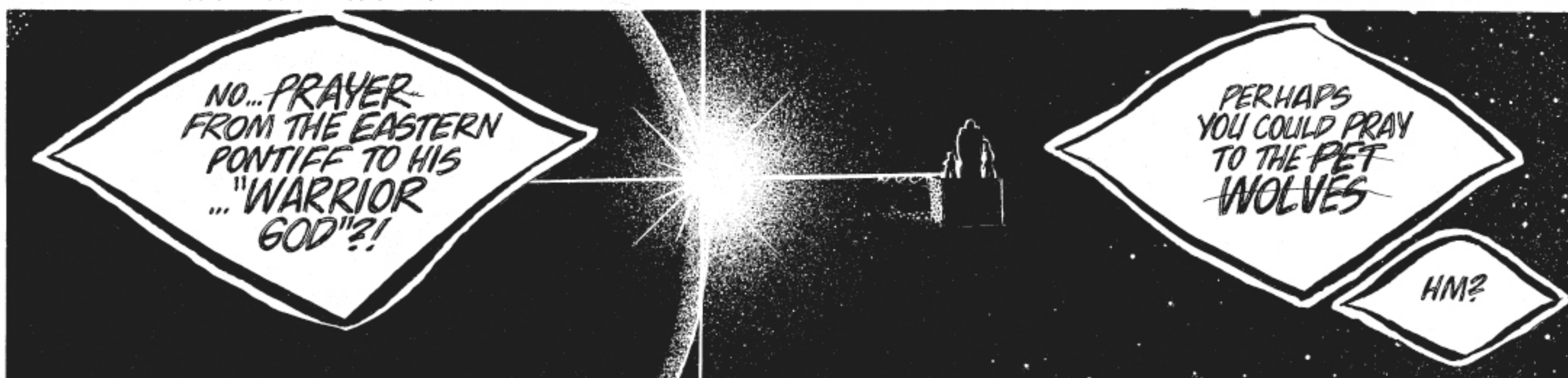
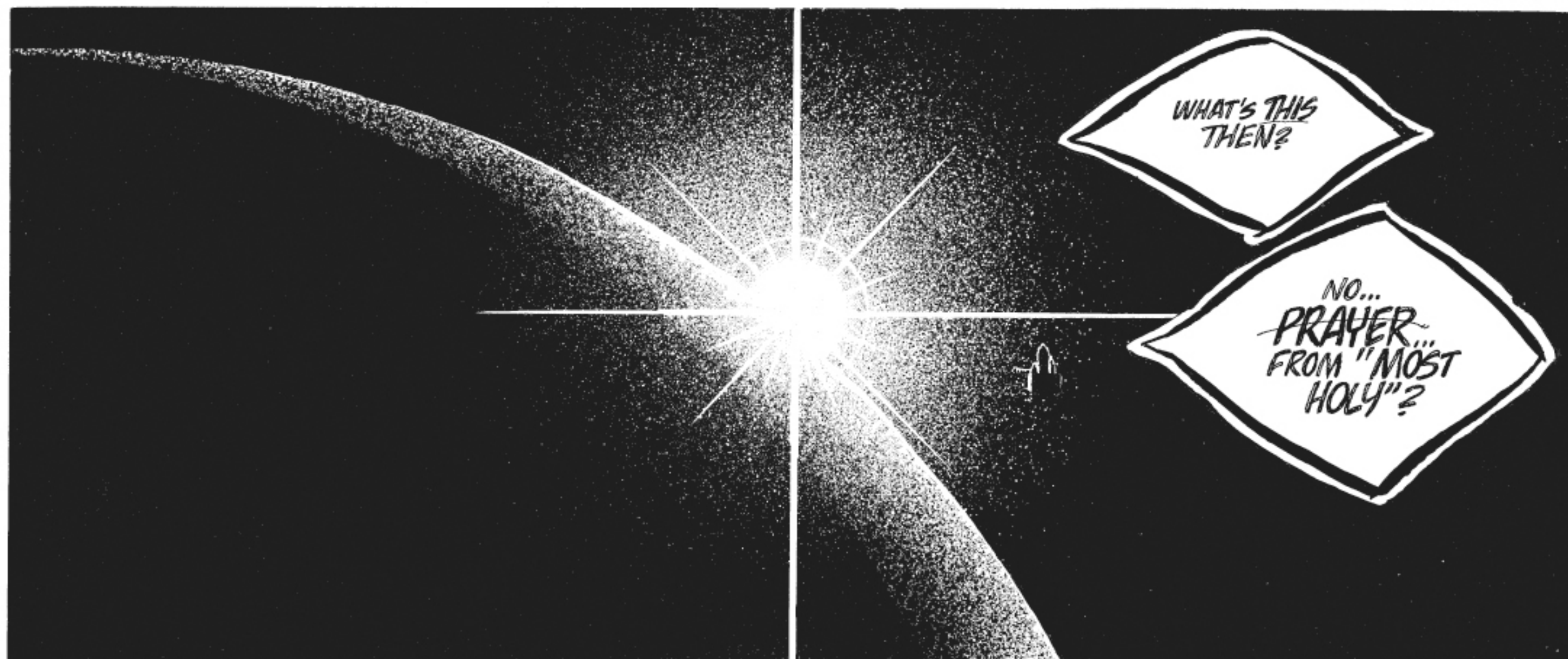
THE CRIMSON
SPHERE! GATEWAY
TO OUR LADY'S INNER
REALM--RED WITH THE
BLOOD OF EVERY
BIRTH WHICH EVER
WAS--OR EVER
WILL BE!

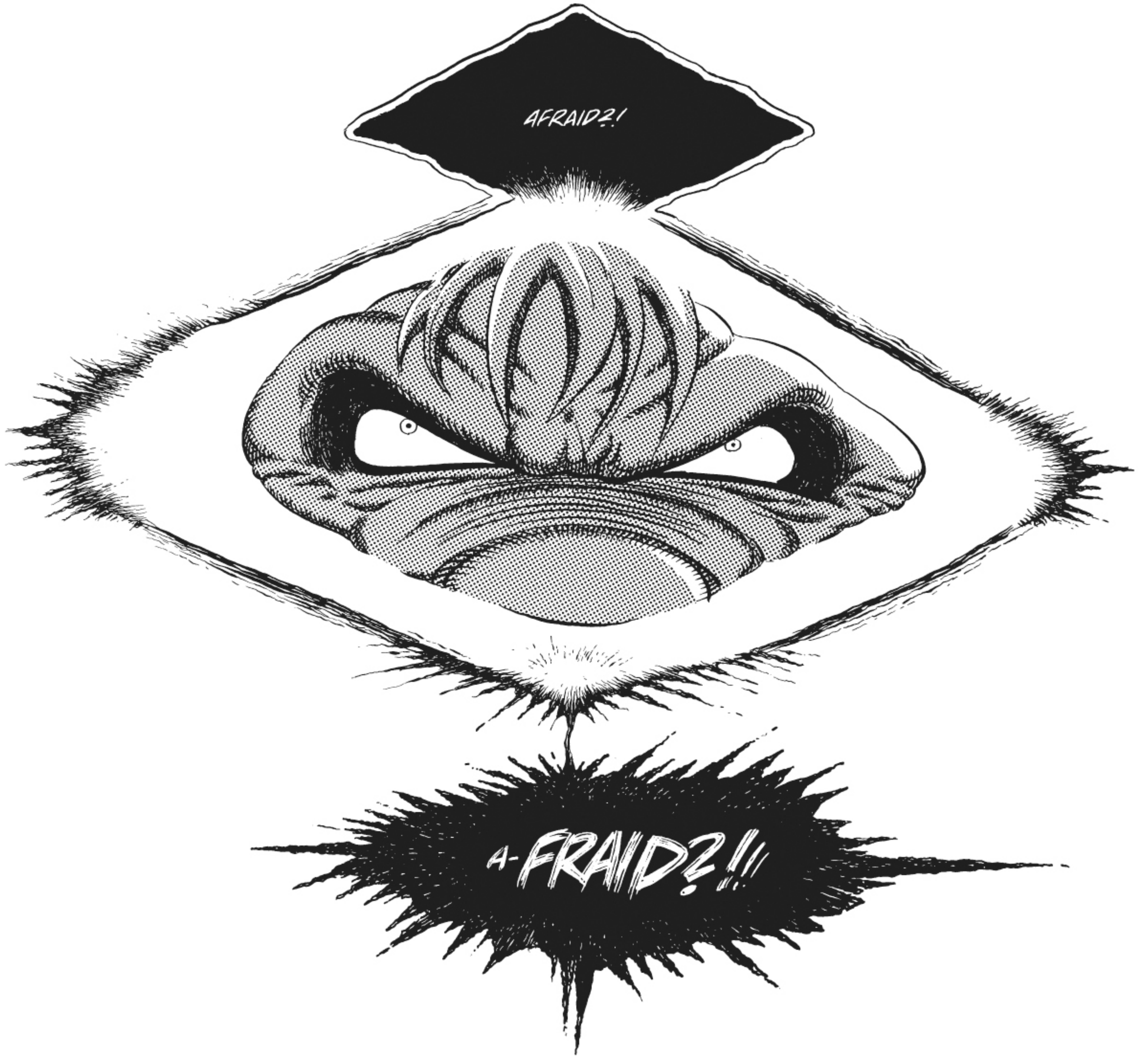
SCORED
BY GREEN
BIRTH CANALS,
SYMBOLIC OF
THE BIRTH AND
REBIRTH OF
ALL LIFE!

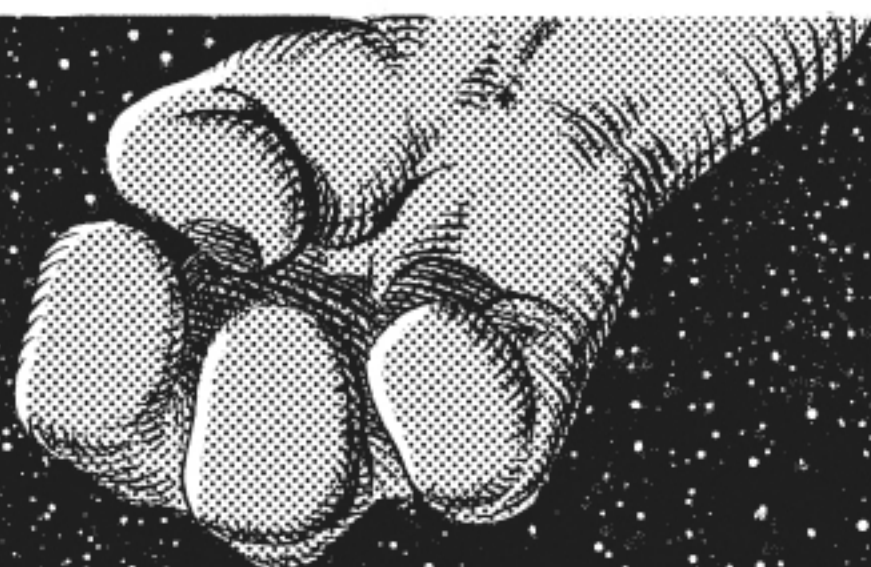








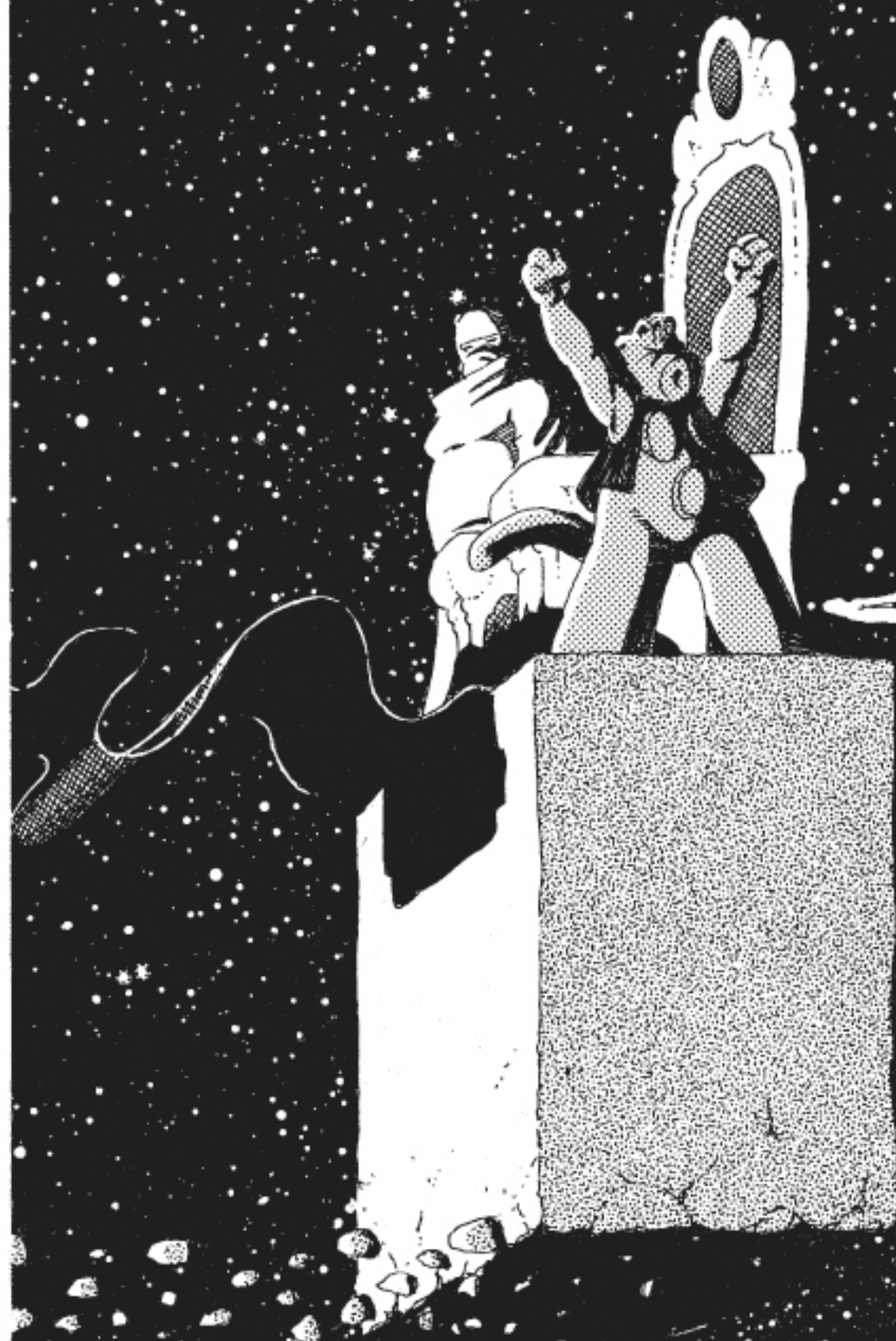




O MERCLESS
TARIM!

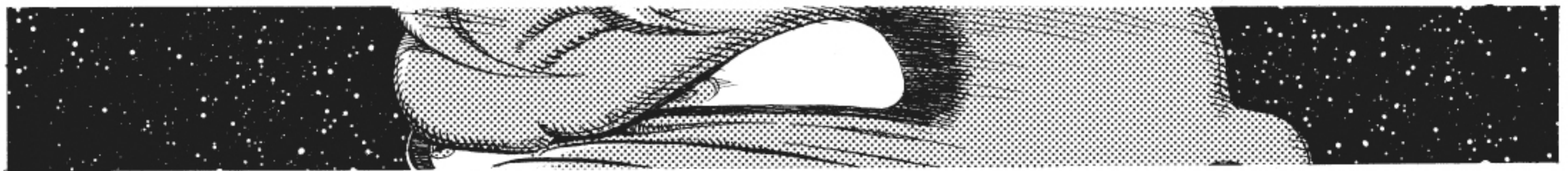
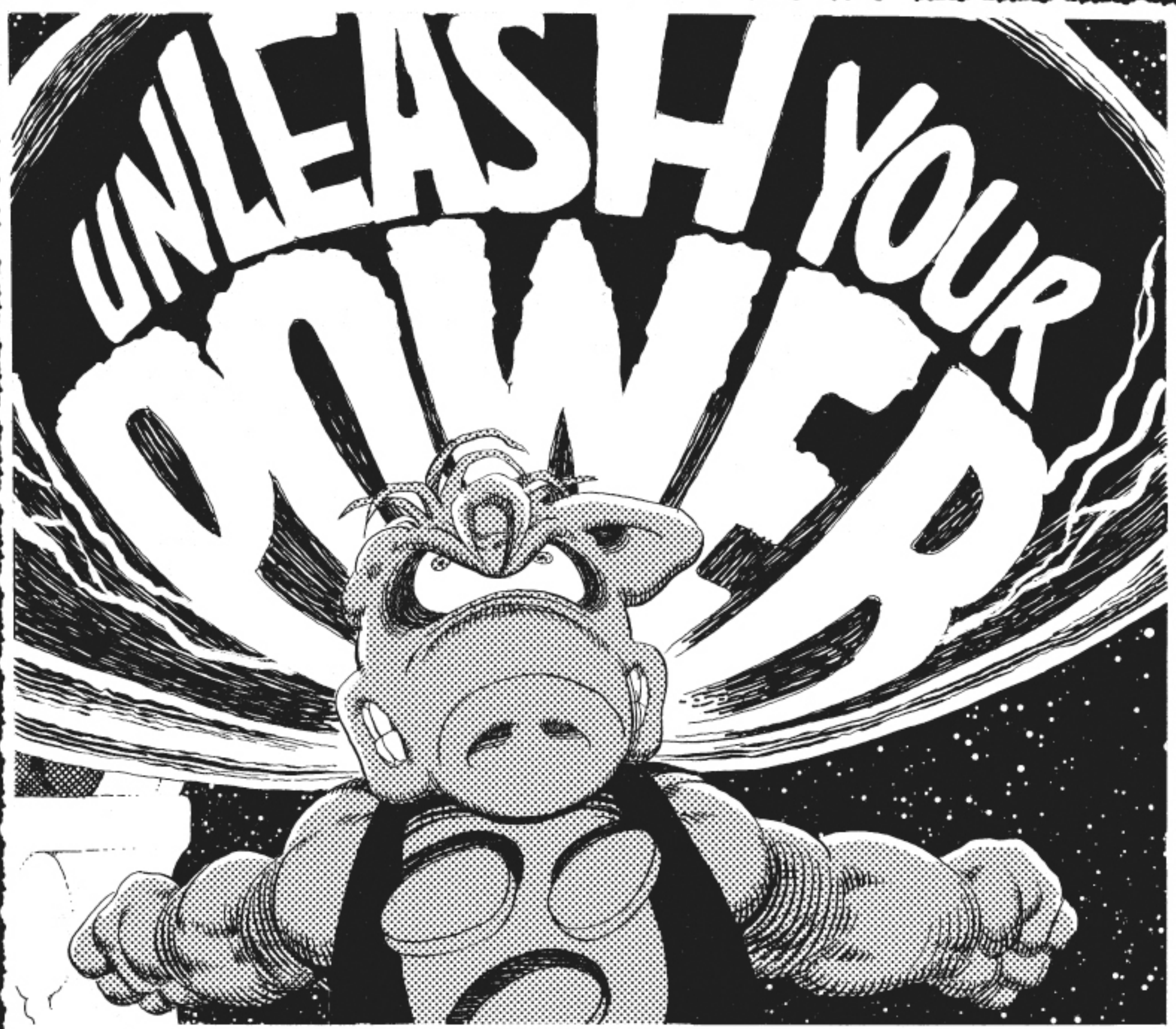


WARRIOR
KING
OF
KINGS

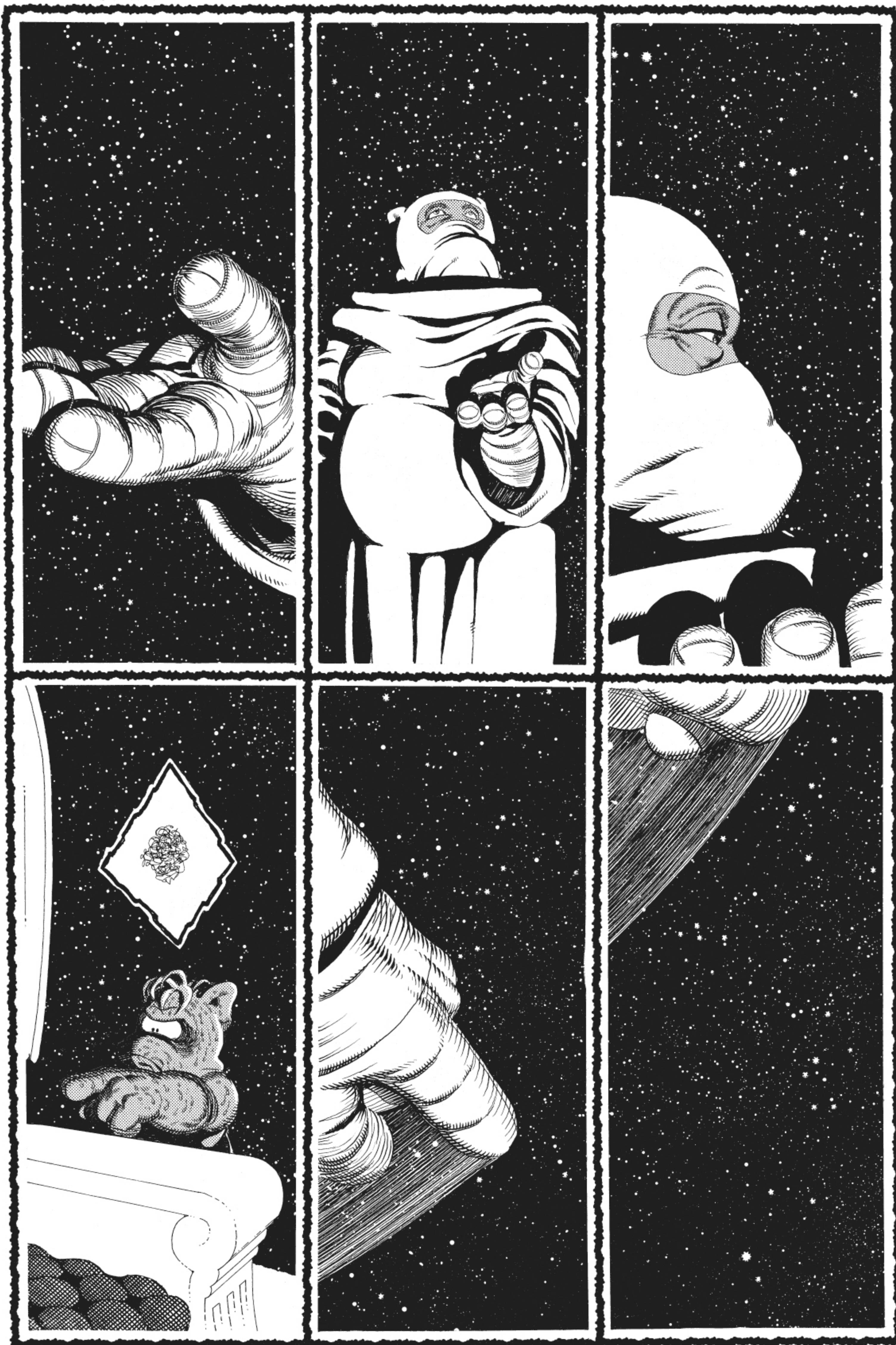


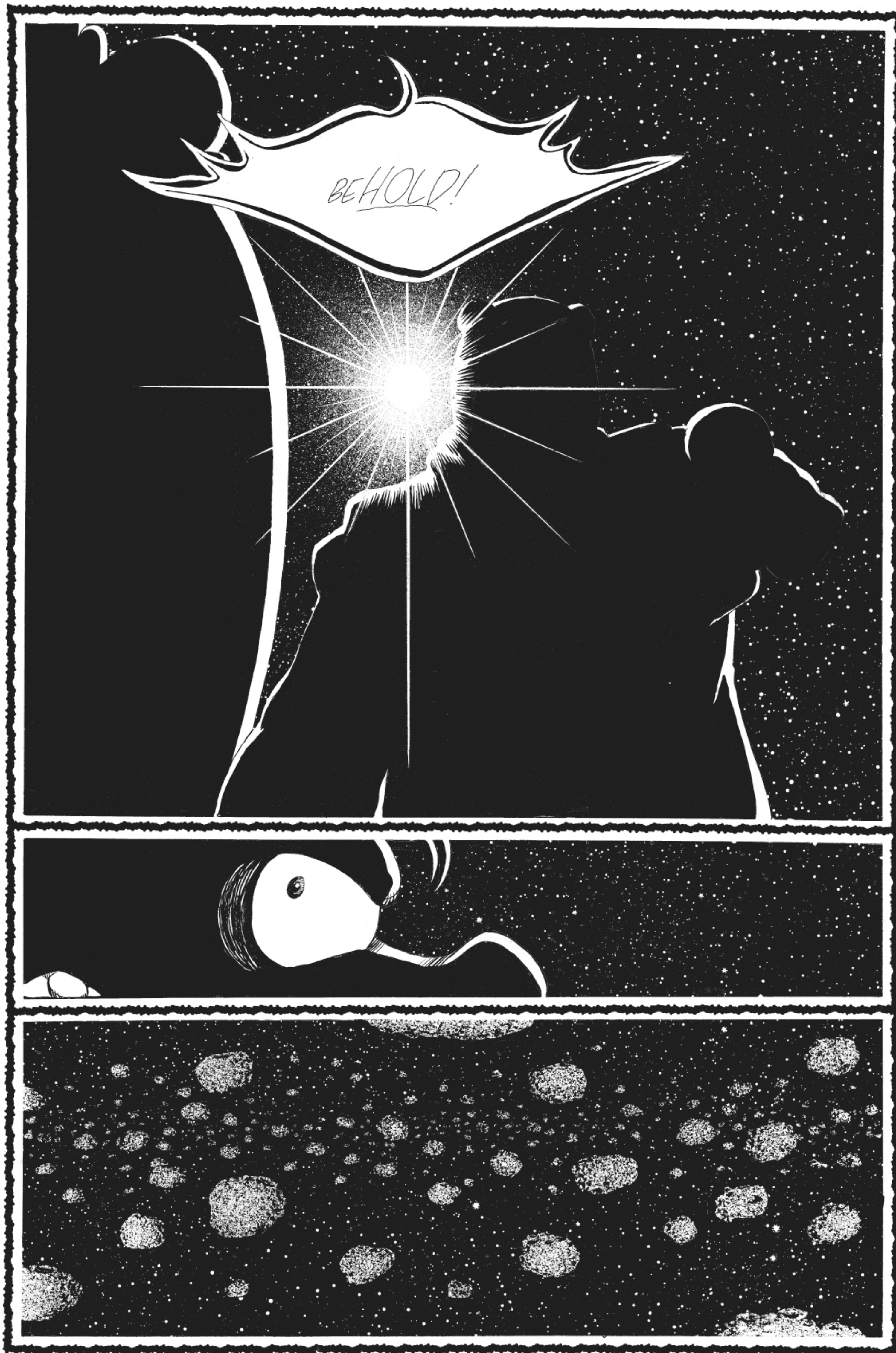
STRIKE!

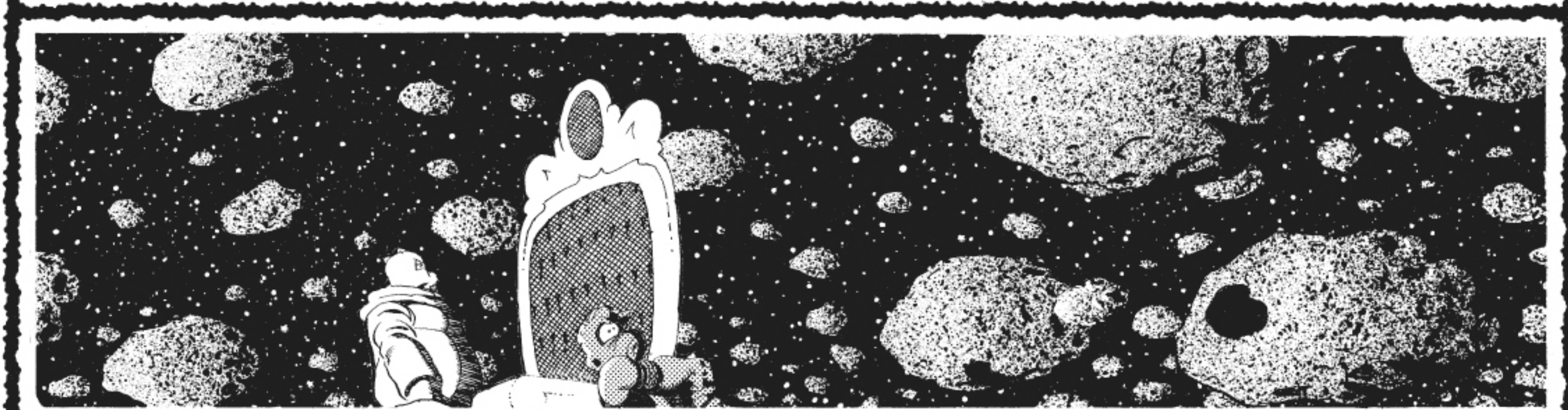
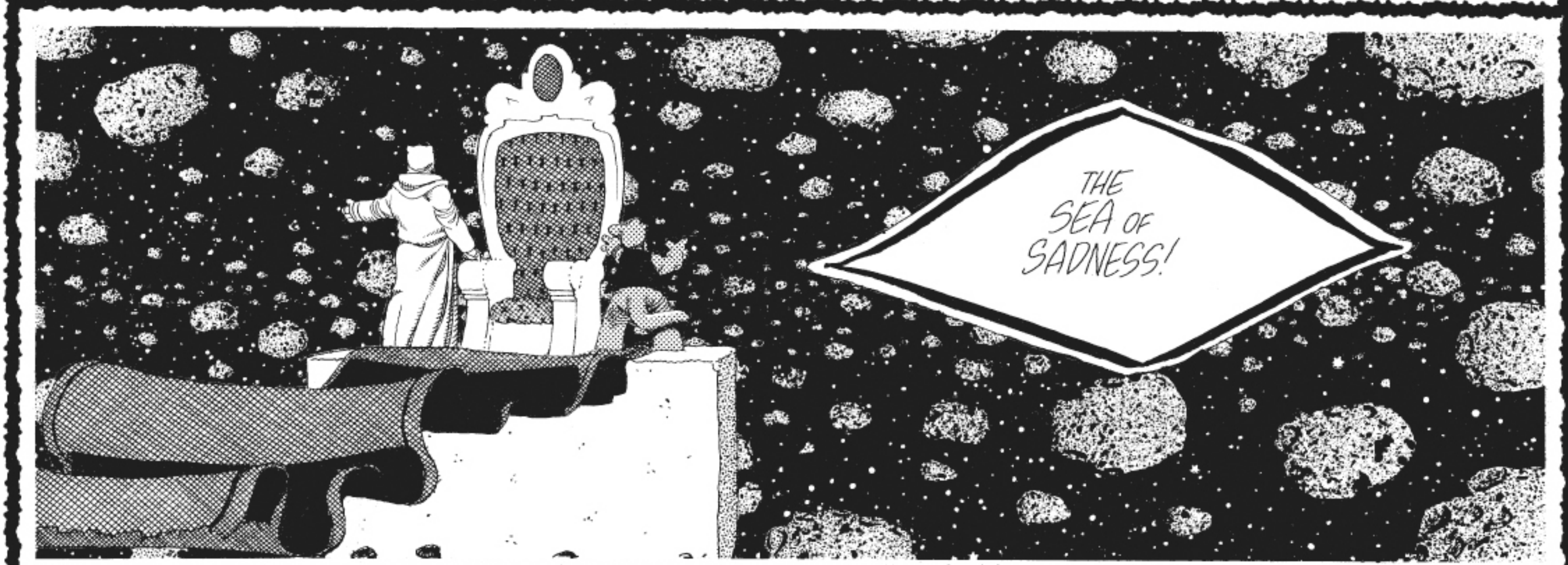
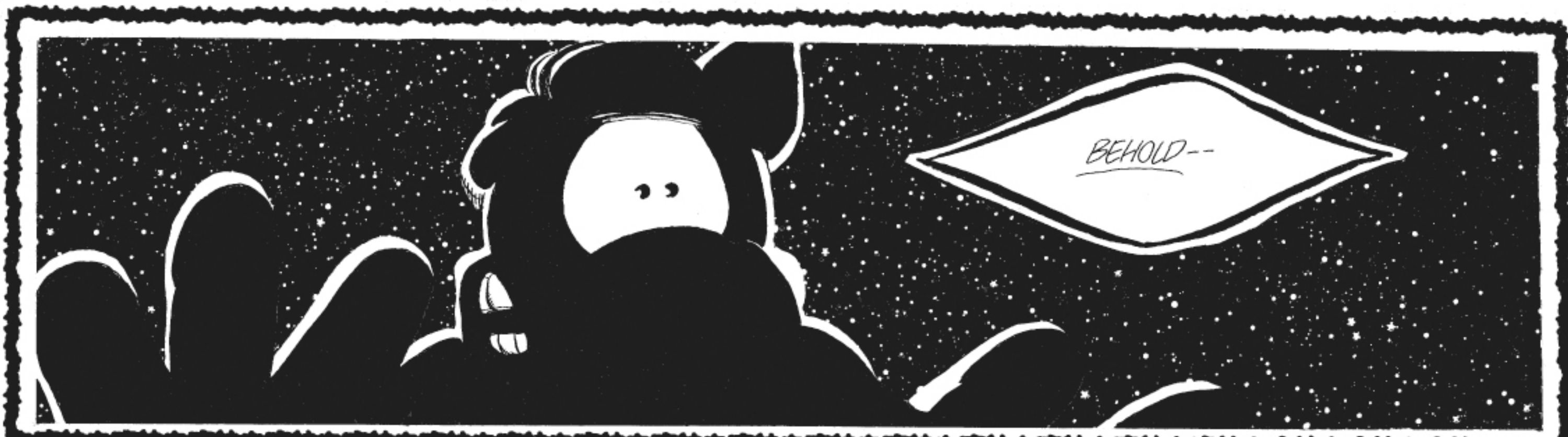
STRIKE
NOW

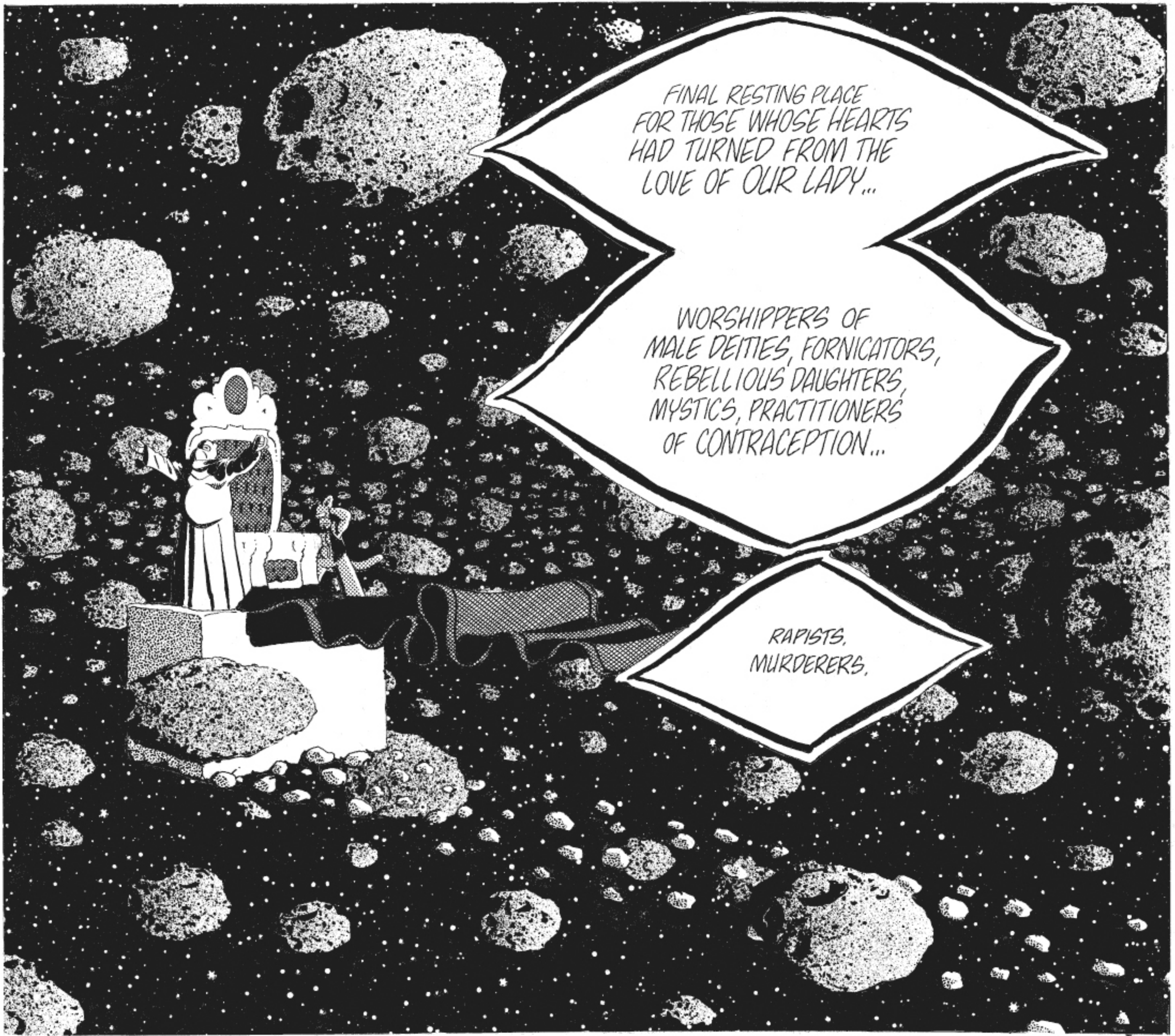
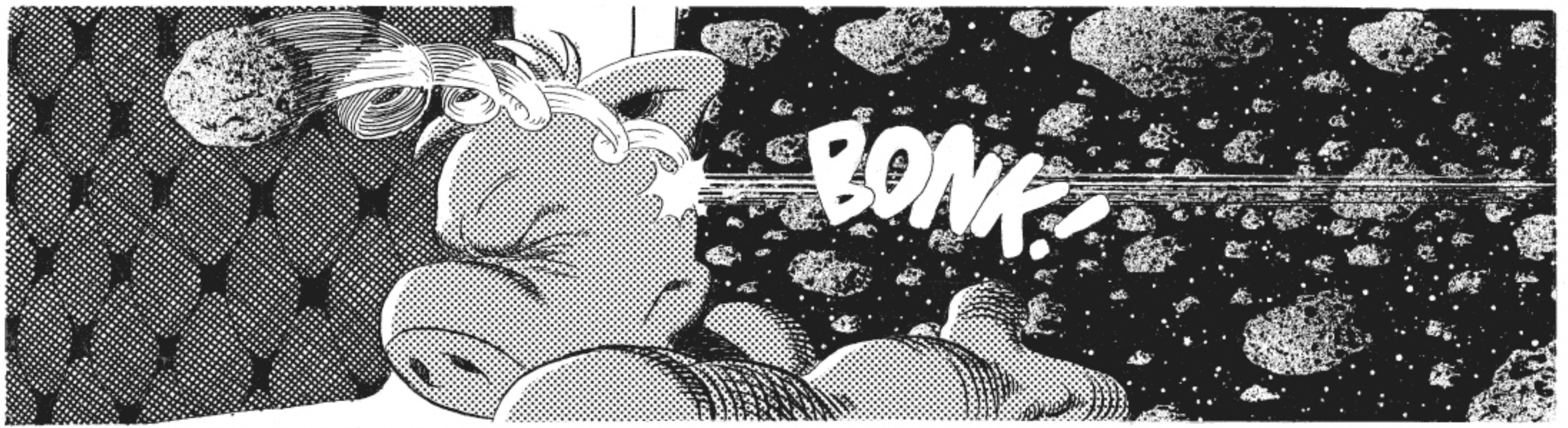












FINAL RESTING PLACE
FOR THOSE WHOSE HEARTS
HAD TURNED FROM THE
LOVE OF OUR LADY...

WORSHIPPERS OF
MALE DEITIES, FORNICATORS,
REBELLIOUS DAUGHTERS,
MYSTICS, PRACTITIONERS
OF CONTRACEPTION...

RAPISTS,
MURDERERS,

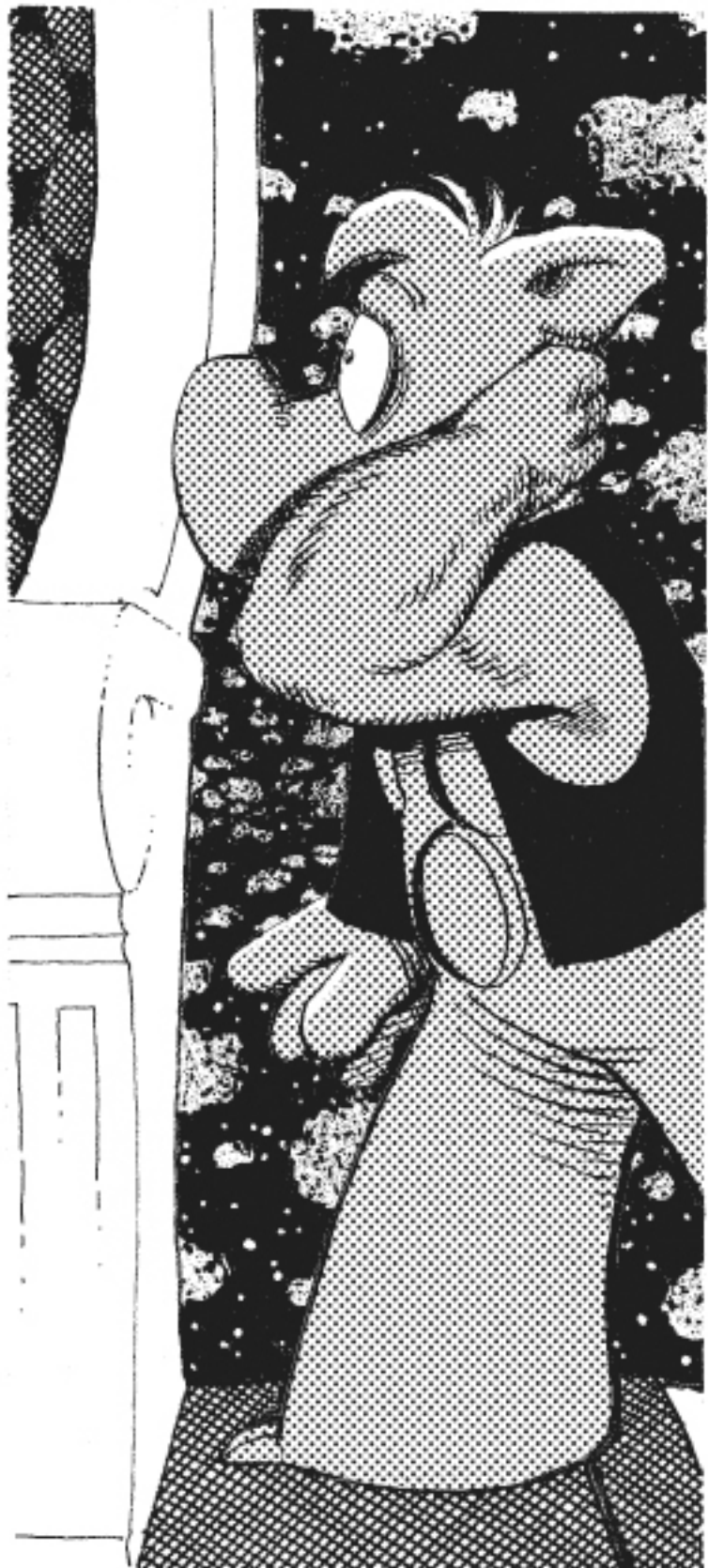


THEIR SOULS
ENCASED
FOR ALL ETERNITY



WITHIN THE HARD AND
BITTER ROCK OF THEIR
OWN MAKING...

HERE TO REMAIN
UNTIL THE END
OF ALL DAYS!



IS THIS YOUR
CHOICE,
CEREBUS?

WOULD YOU
JOIN THEM-?
SHARE THEIR
WOE? THEIR
MISERY?

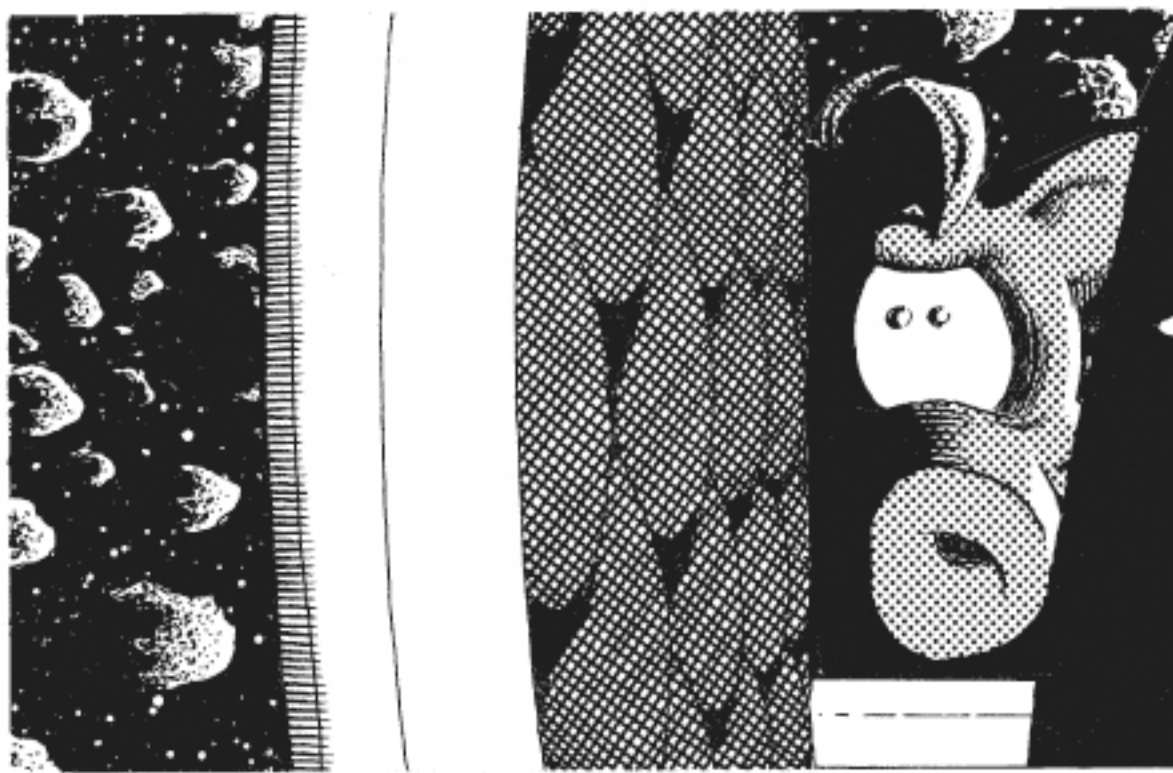




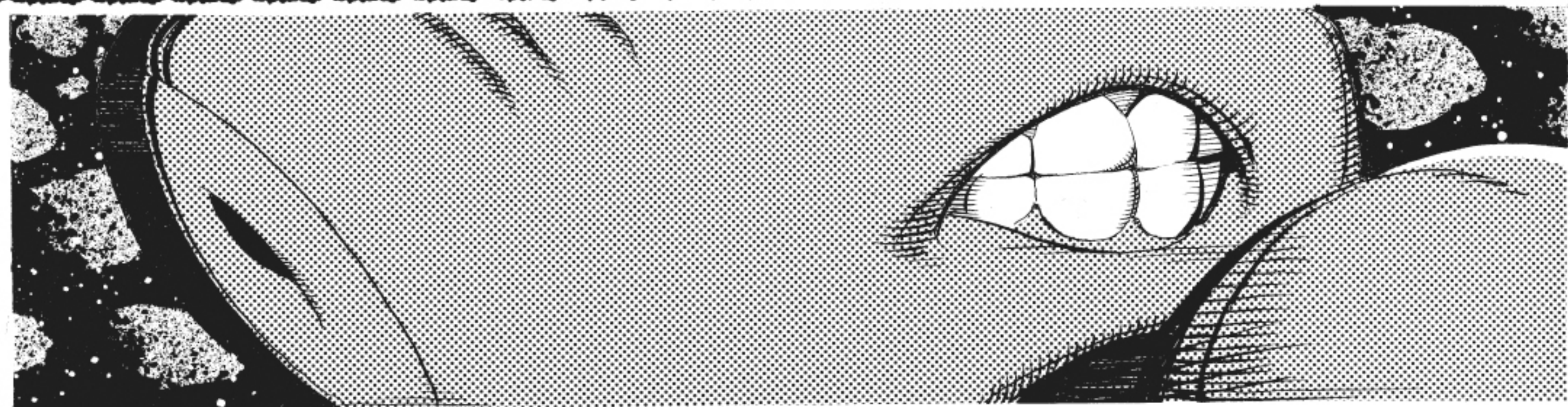
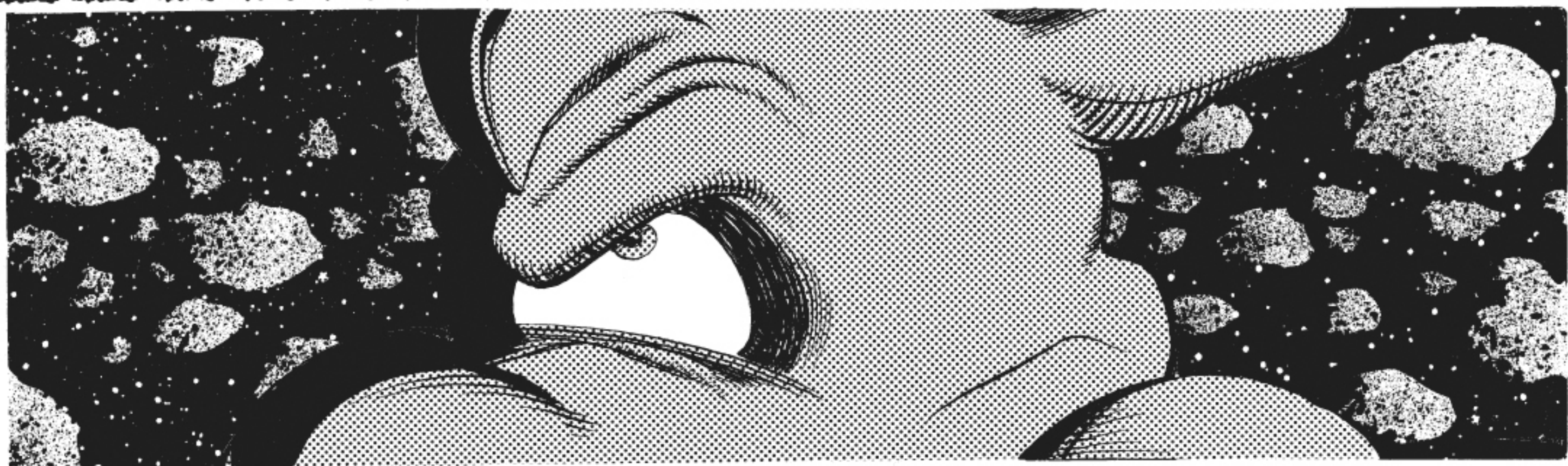
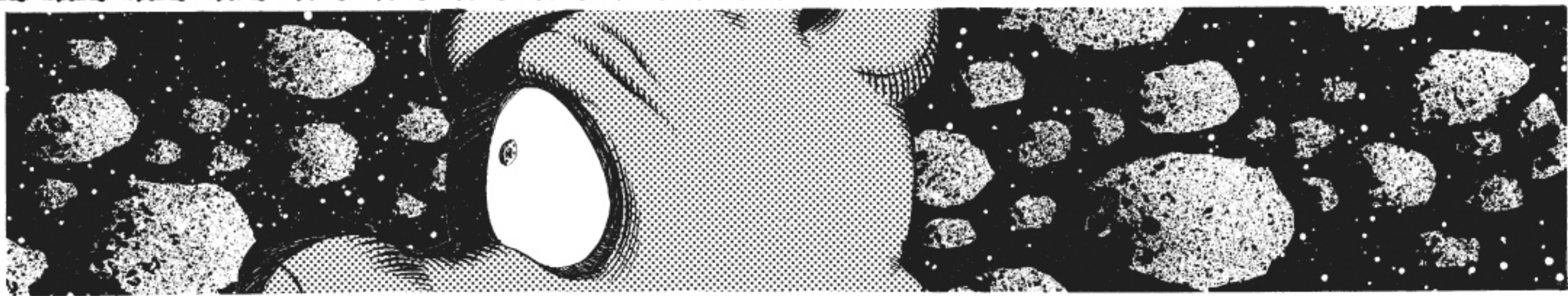
BOW
DOWN!

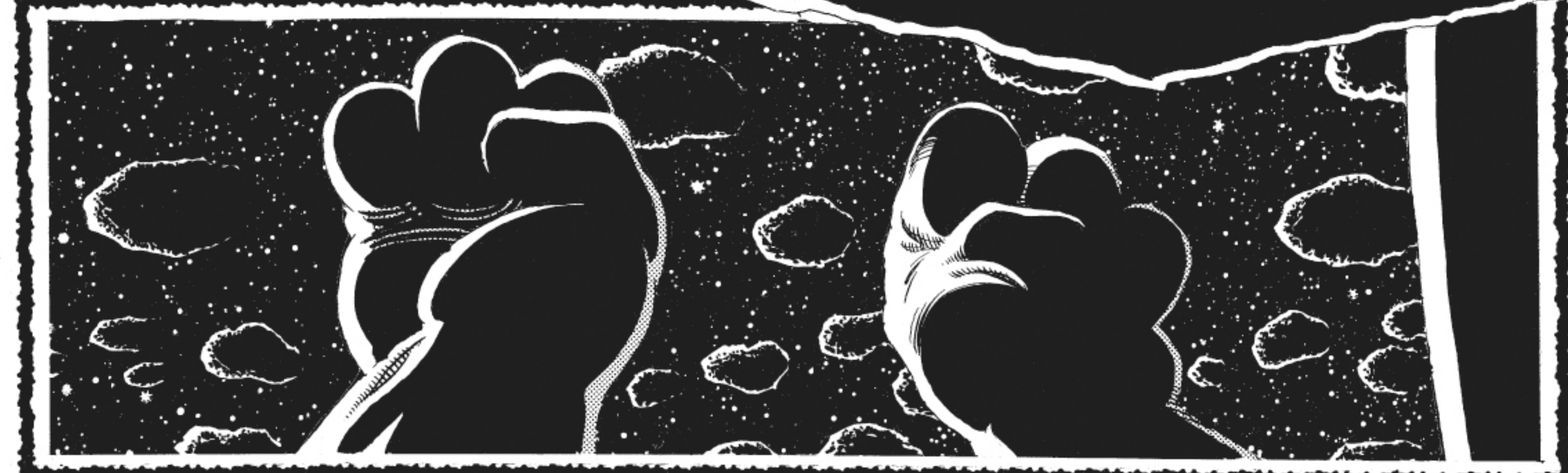


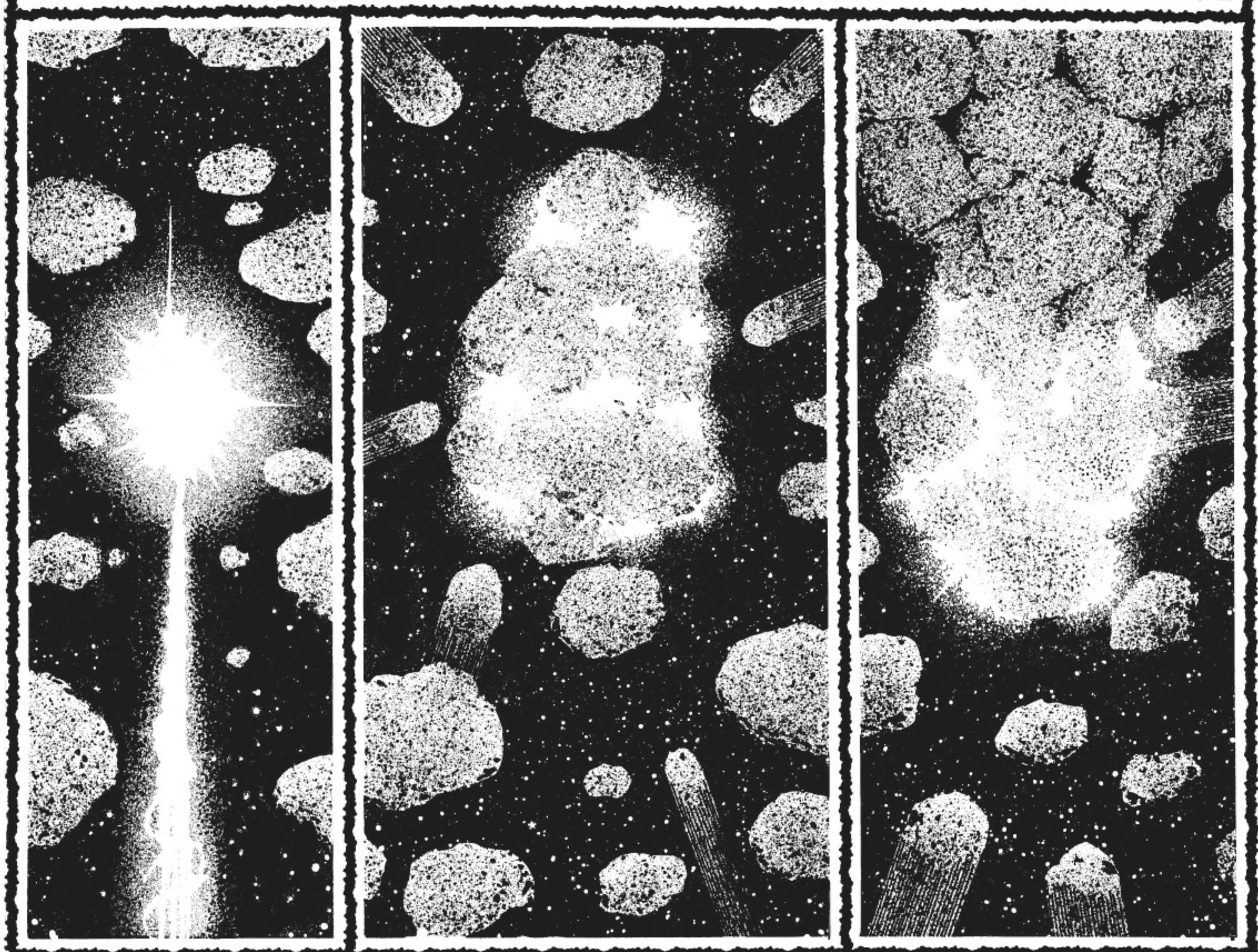
BOW DOWN TO
THE GIVER OF ALL
LIFE!

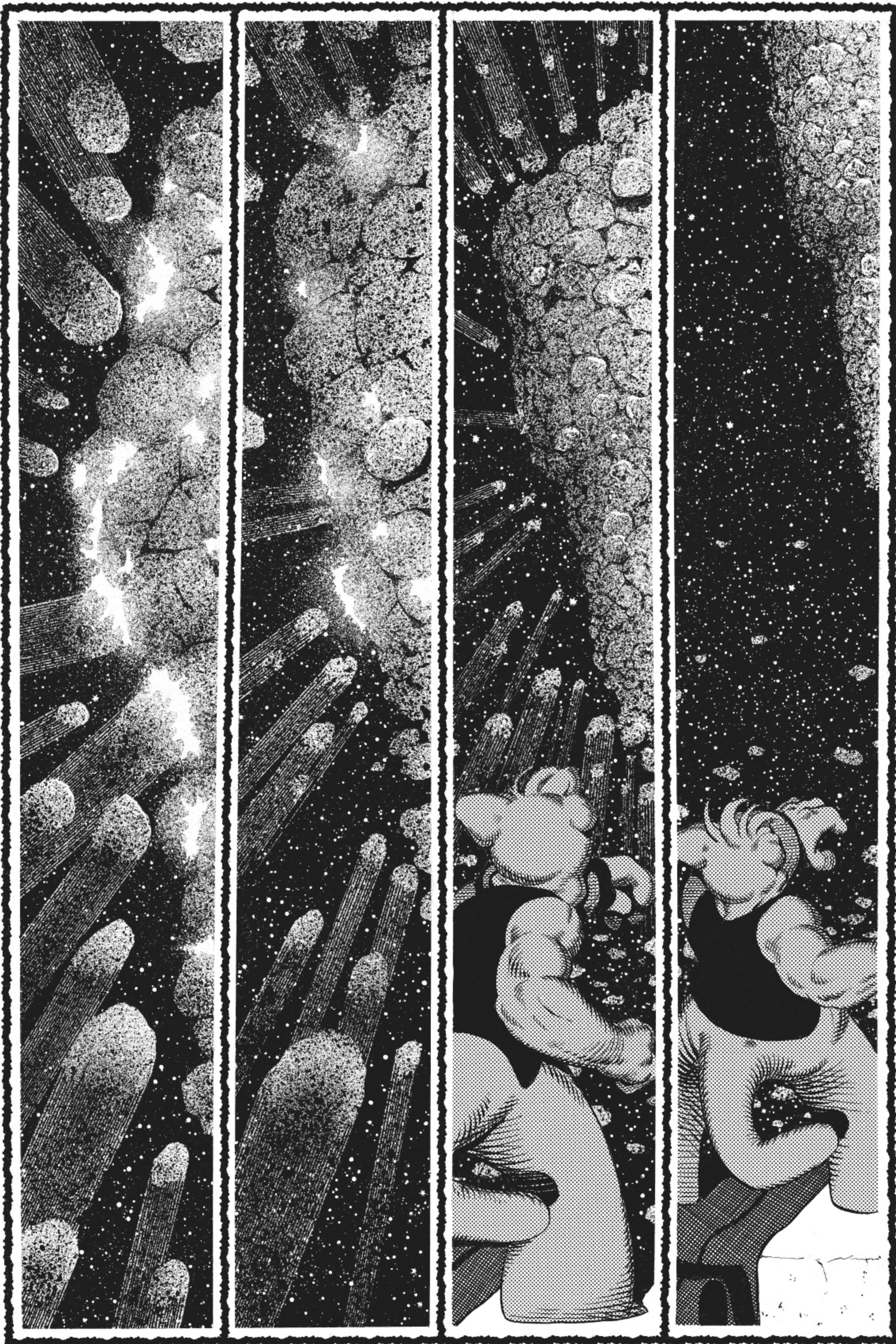


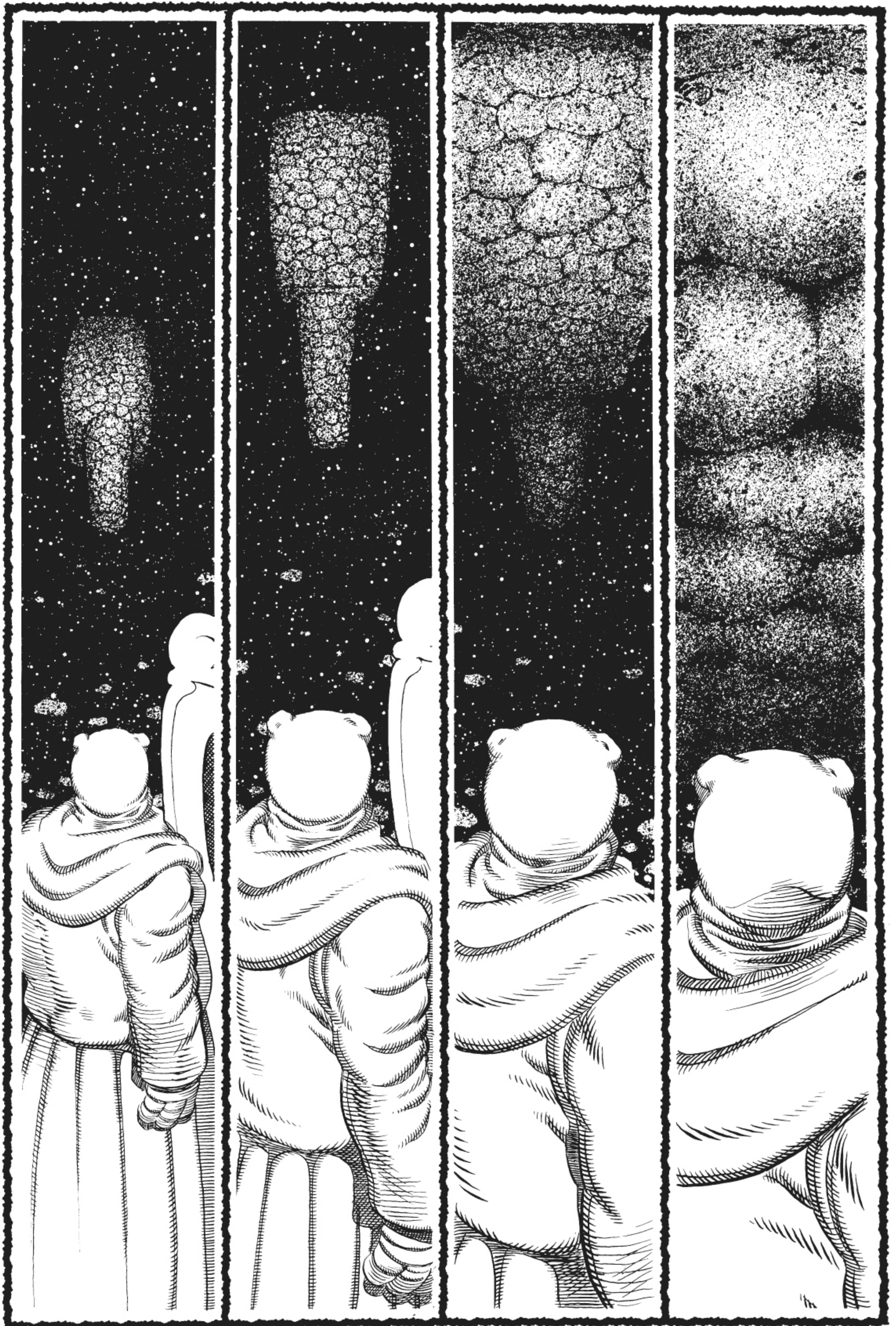
SAVE YOUR
IMMORTAL
SOLIL....

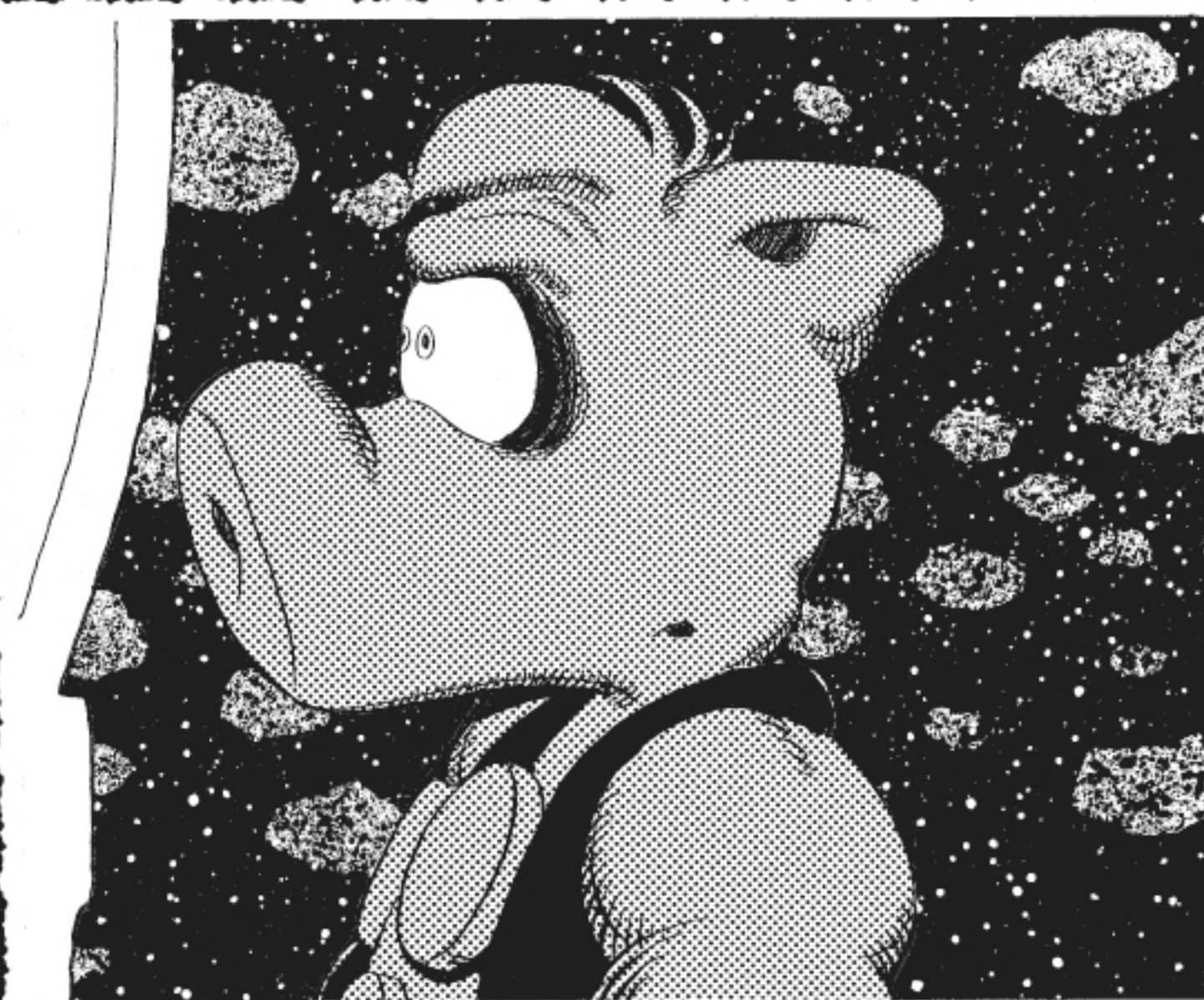
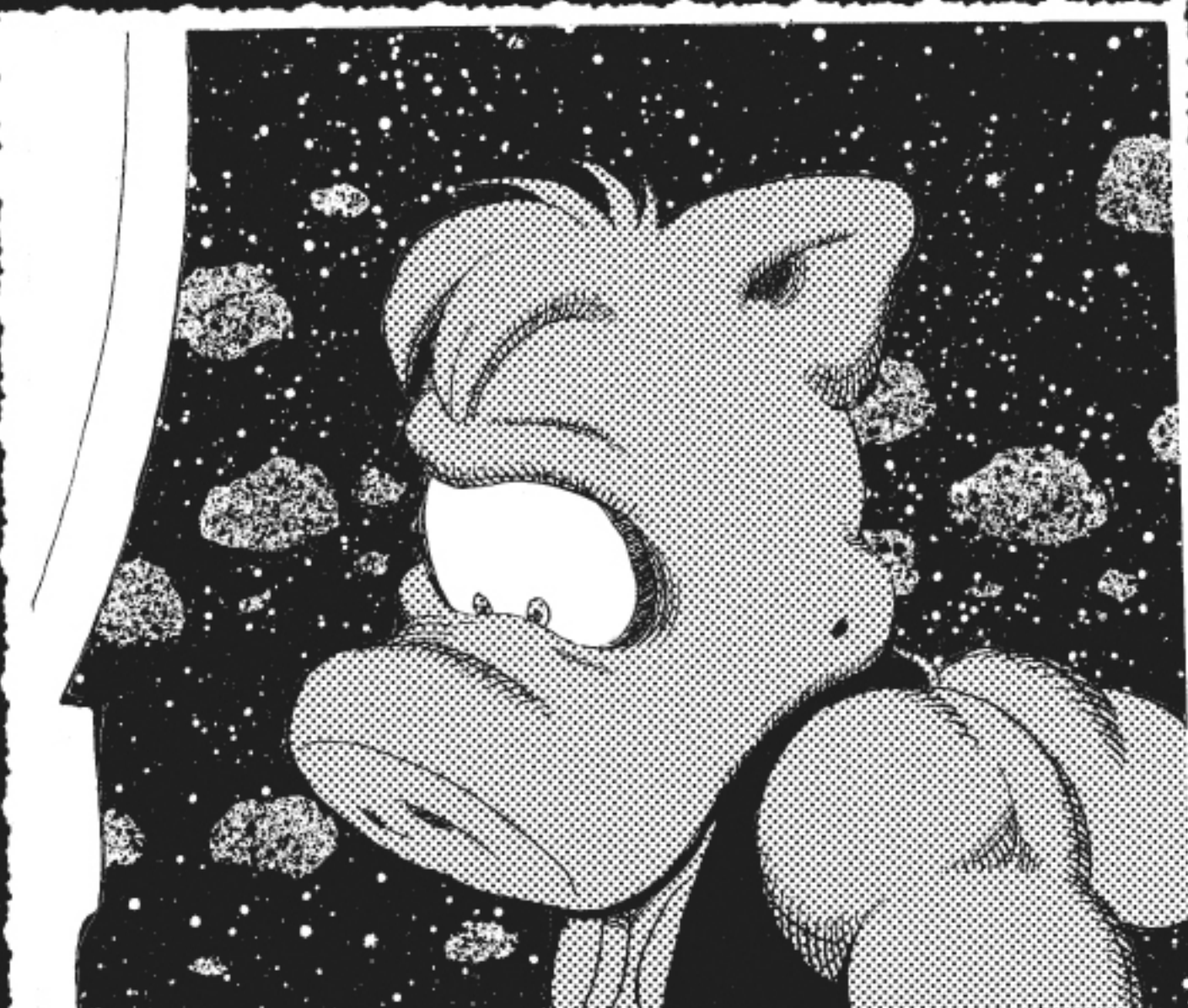
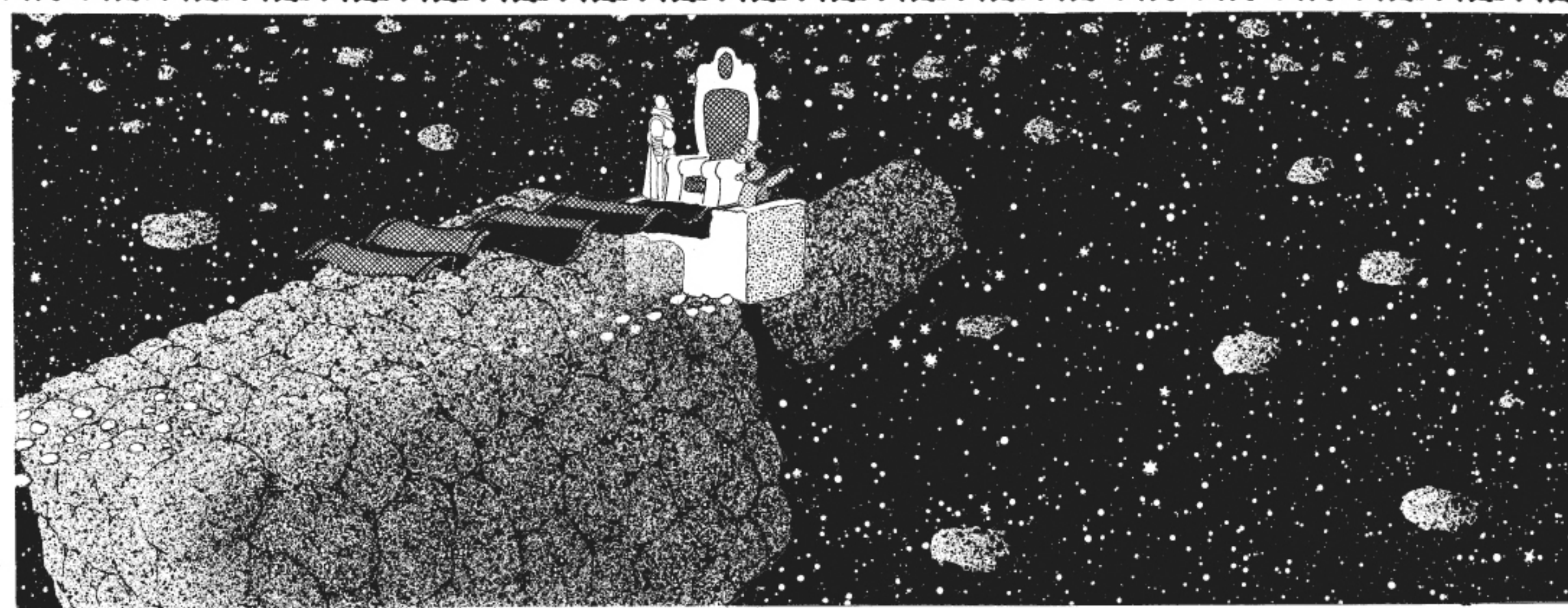


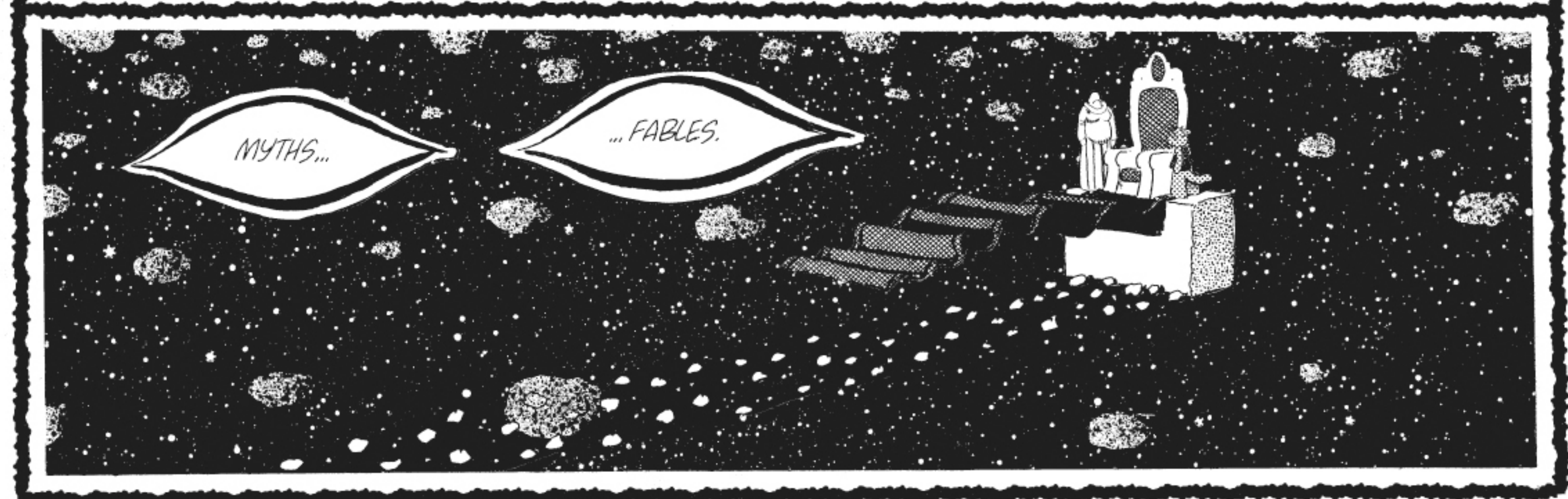














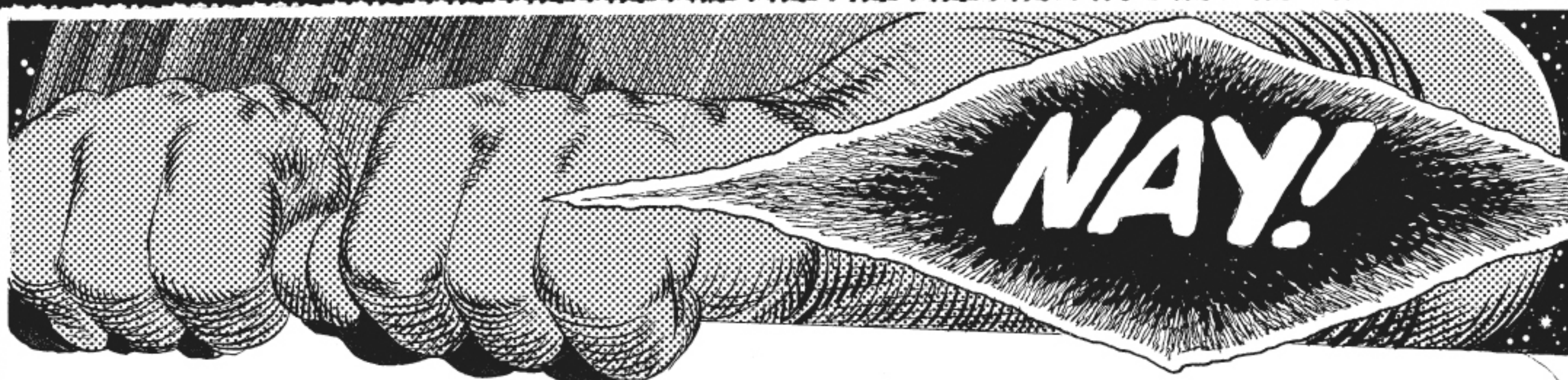
YOU HAVE NO
VALID CLAIM
TO THIS THRONE,
CEREBUS!



YOU WERE
MERELY WEISSHAUPT'S
PUPPET!!

A
POLITICAL
PAWN!!

A
JOKE!!

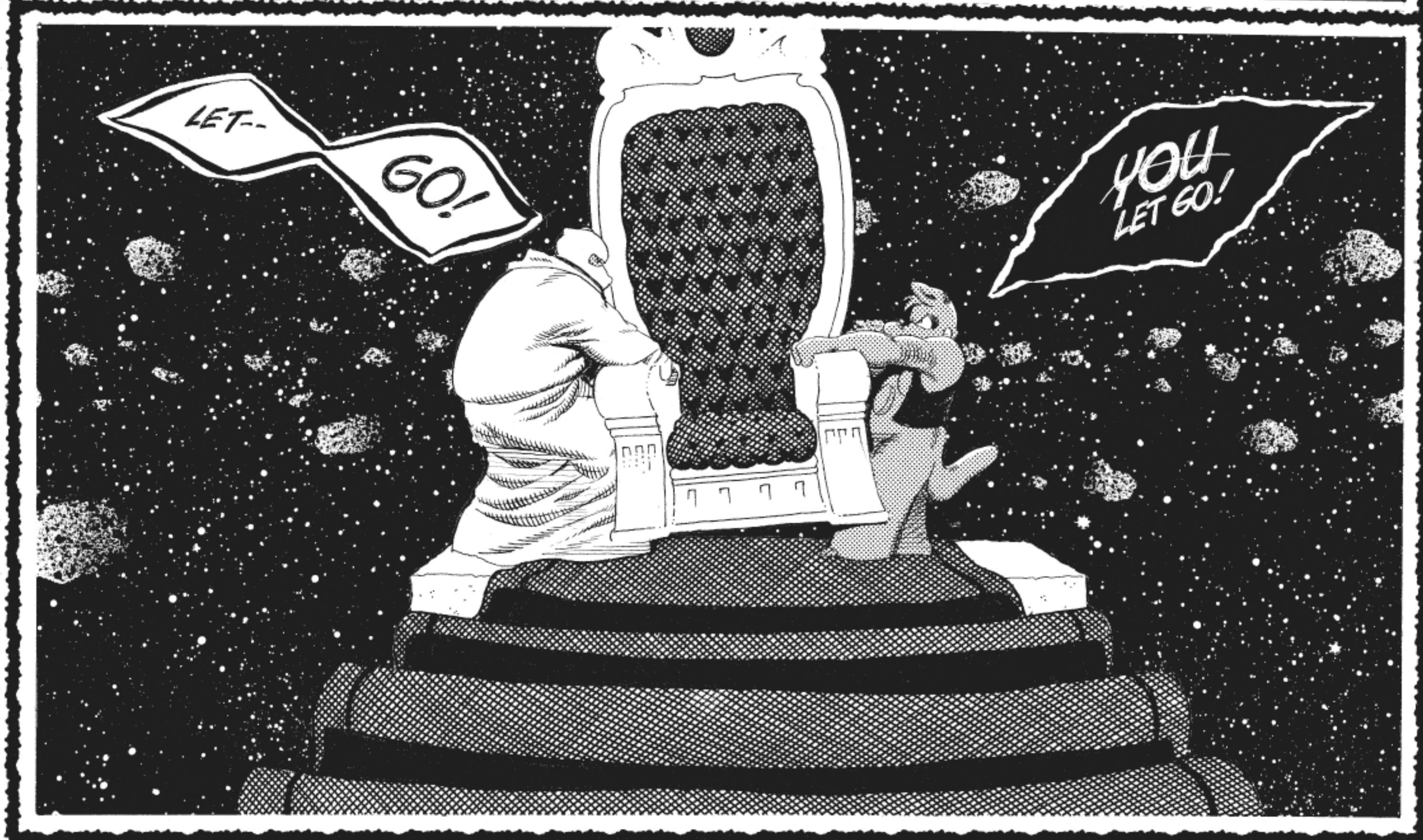
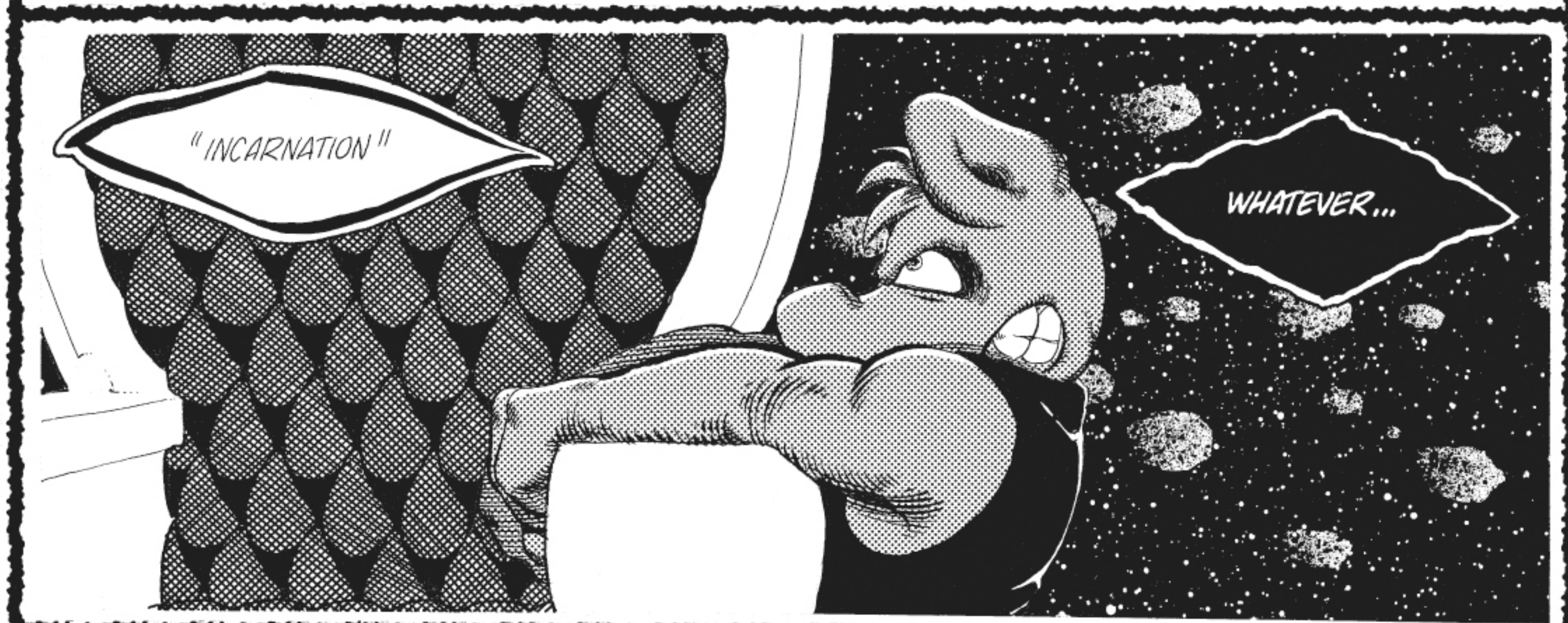


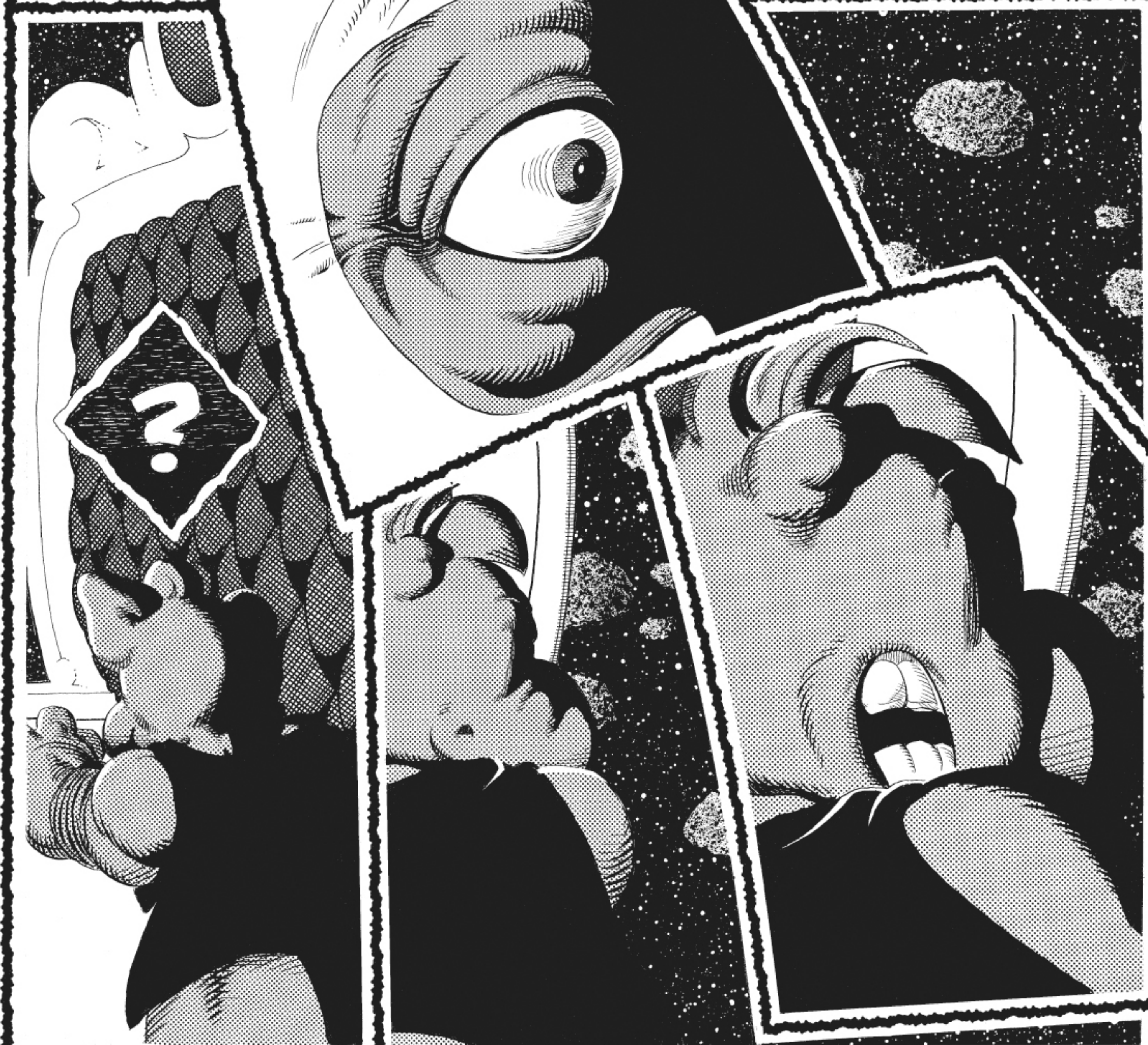
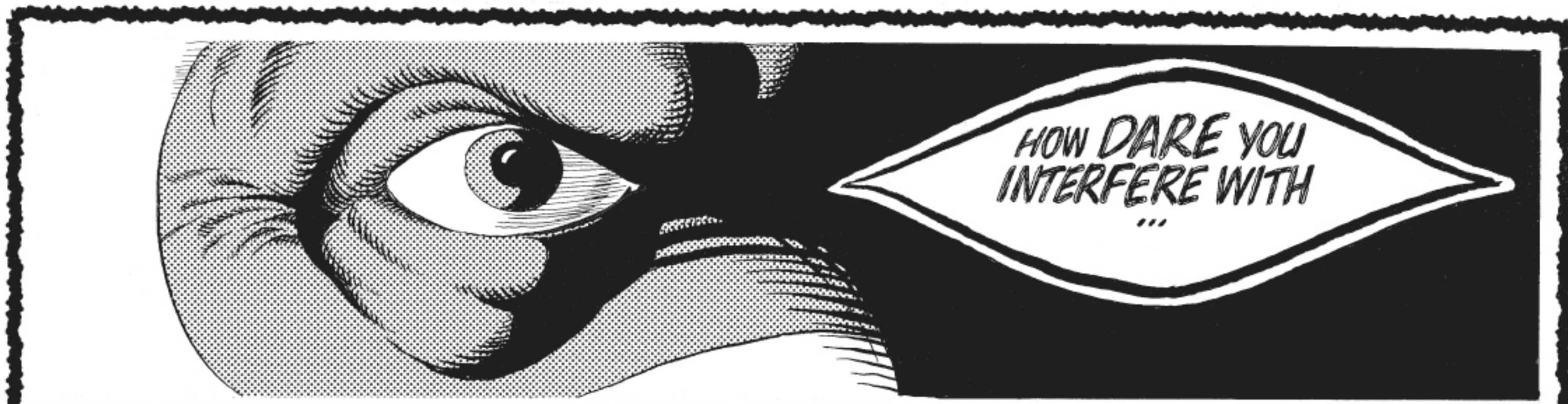
NAY!



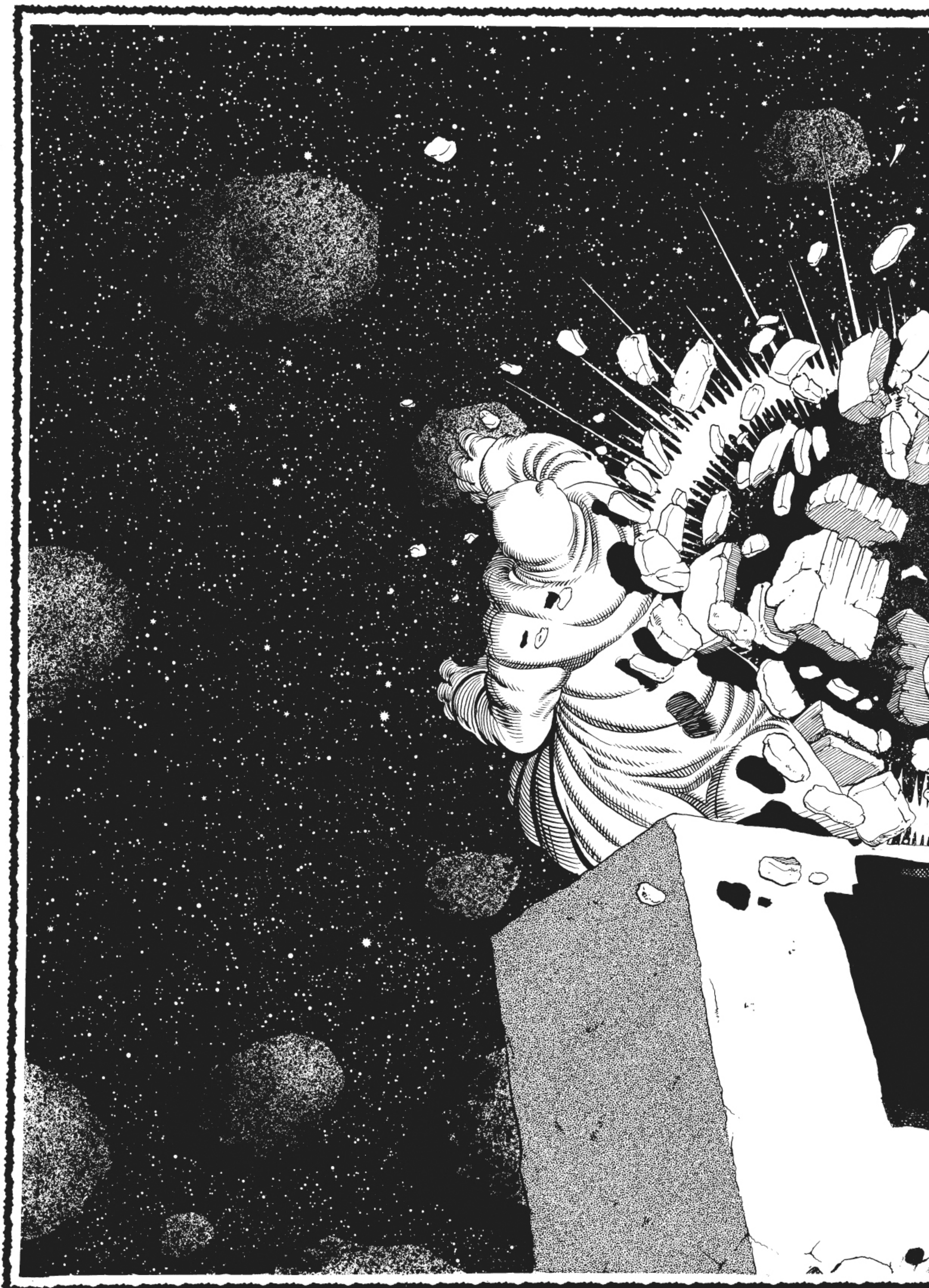
IT WAS THE
WILL OF THE
LIVING TARIM
THAT

UNH.-

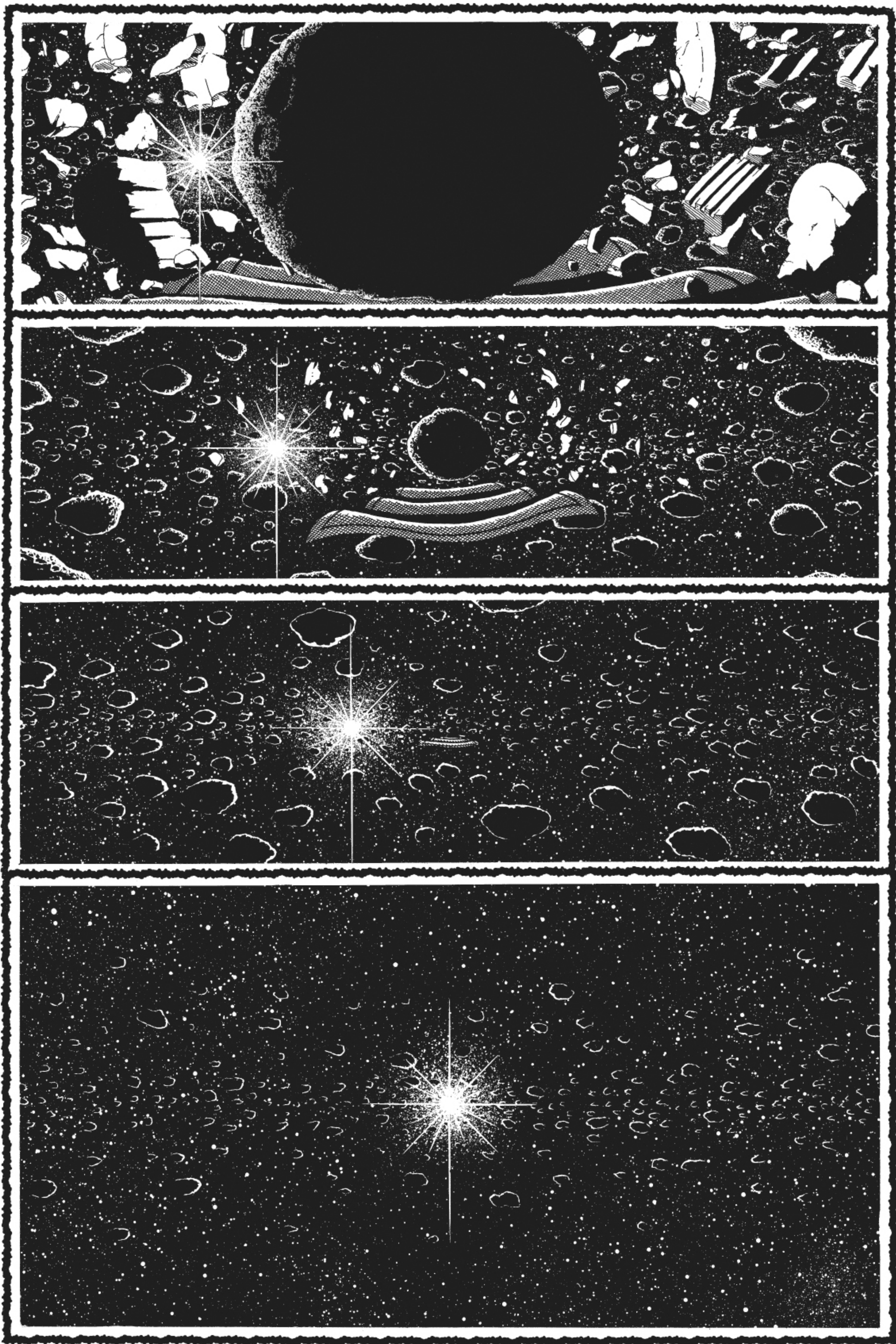


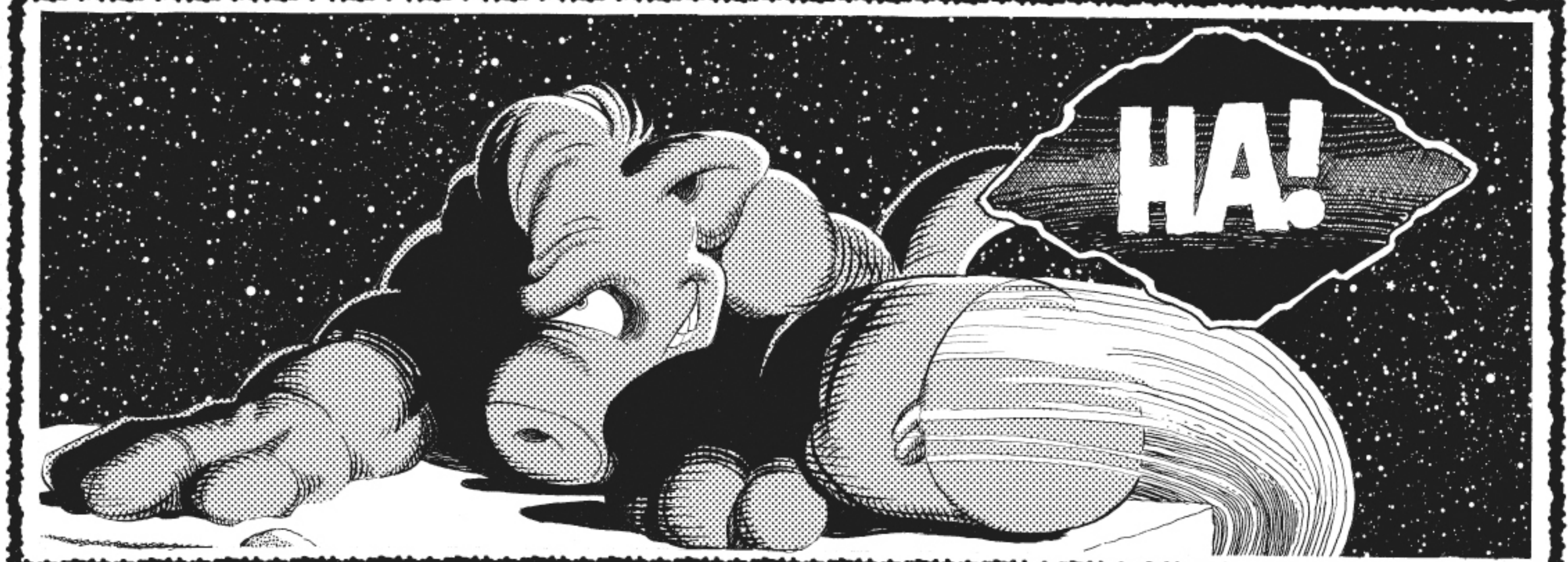
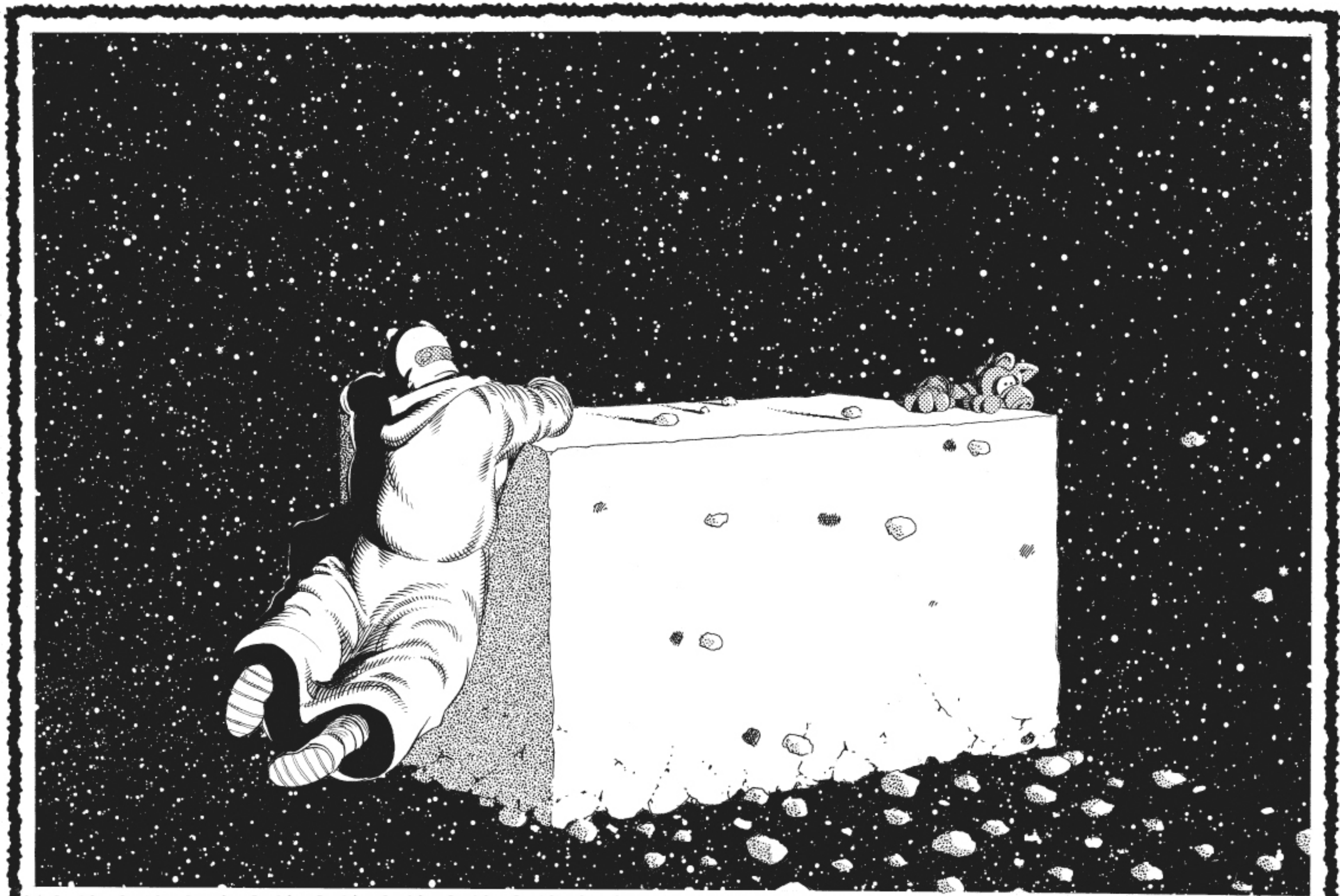


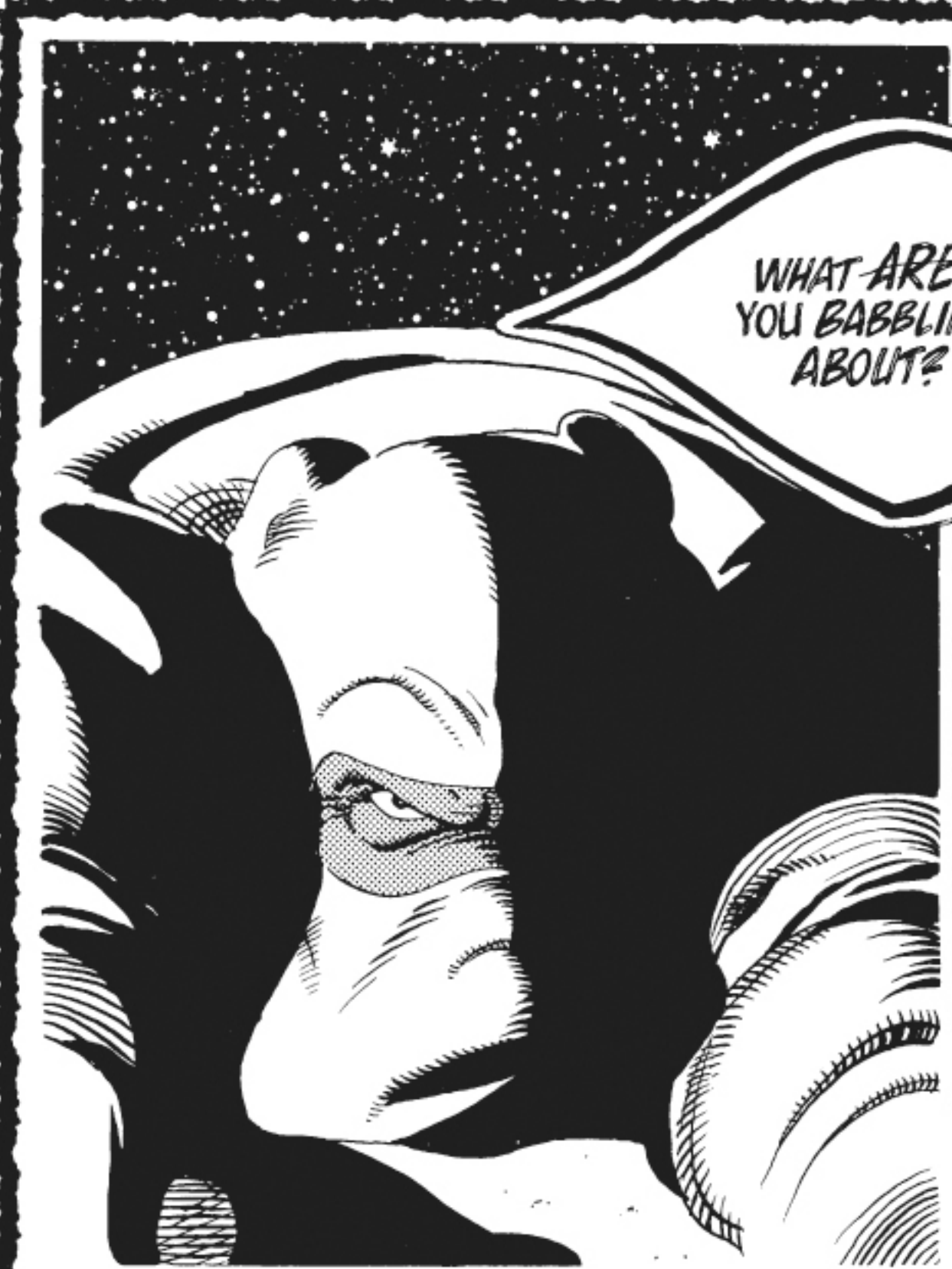




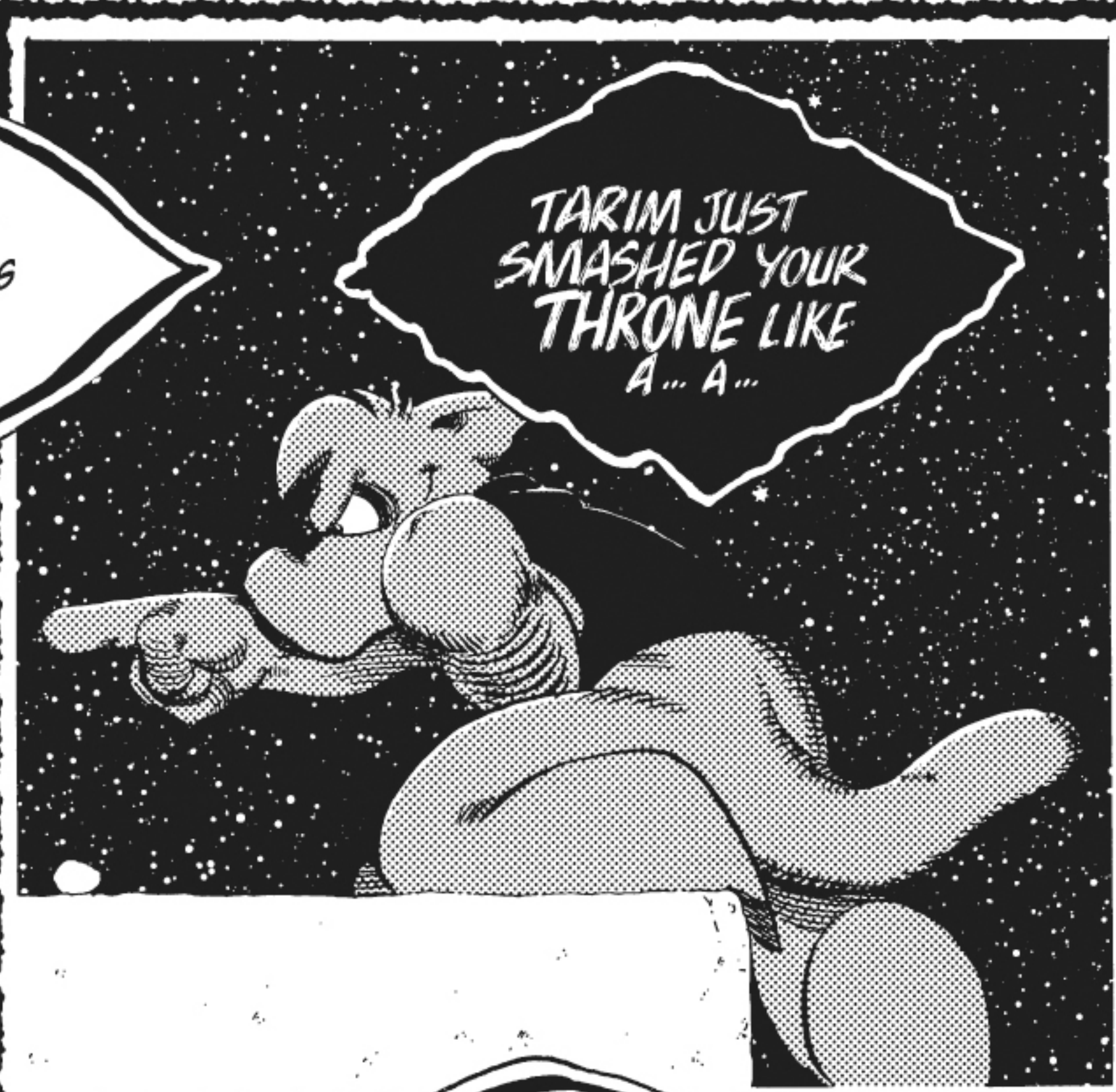




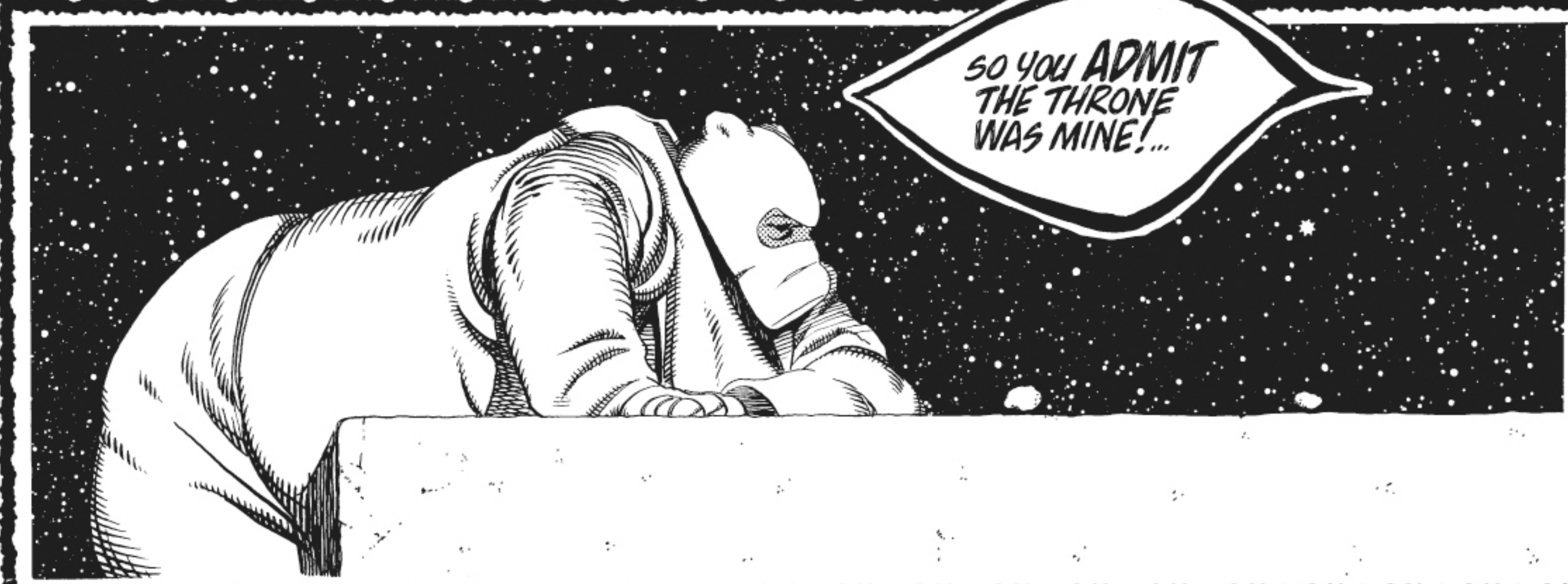




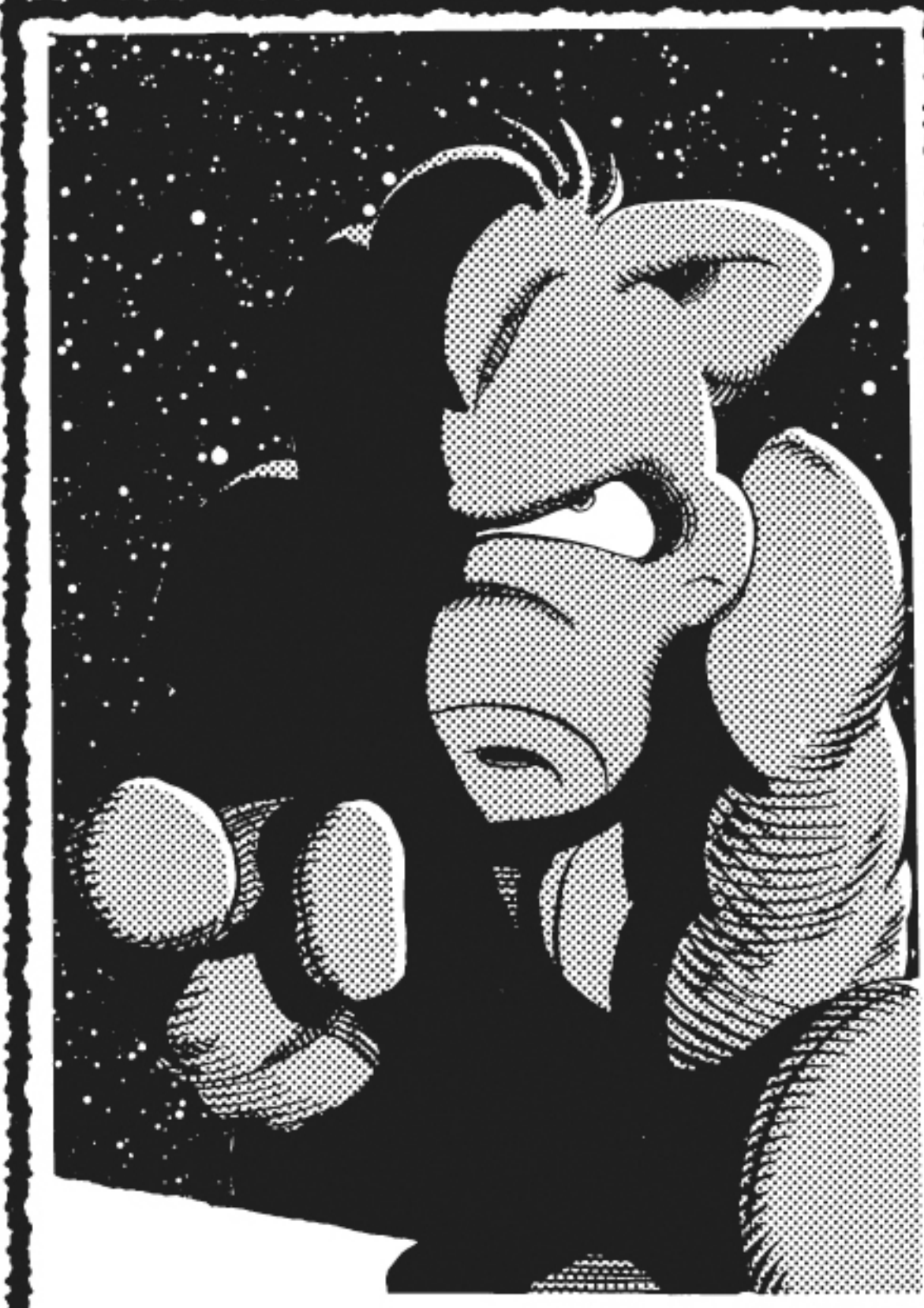
WHAT ARE
YOU BABBLING
ABOUT?



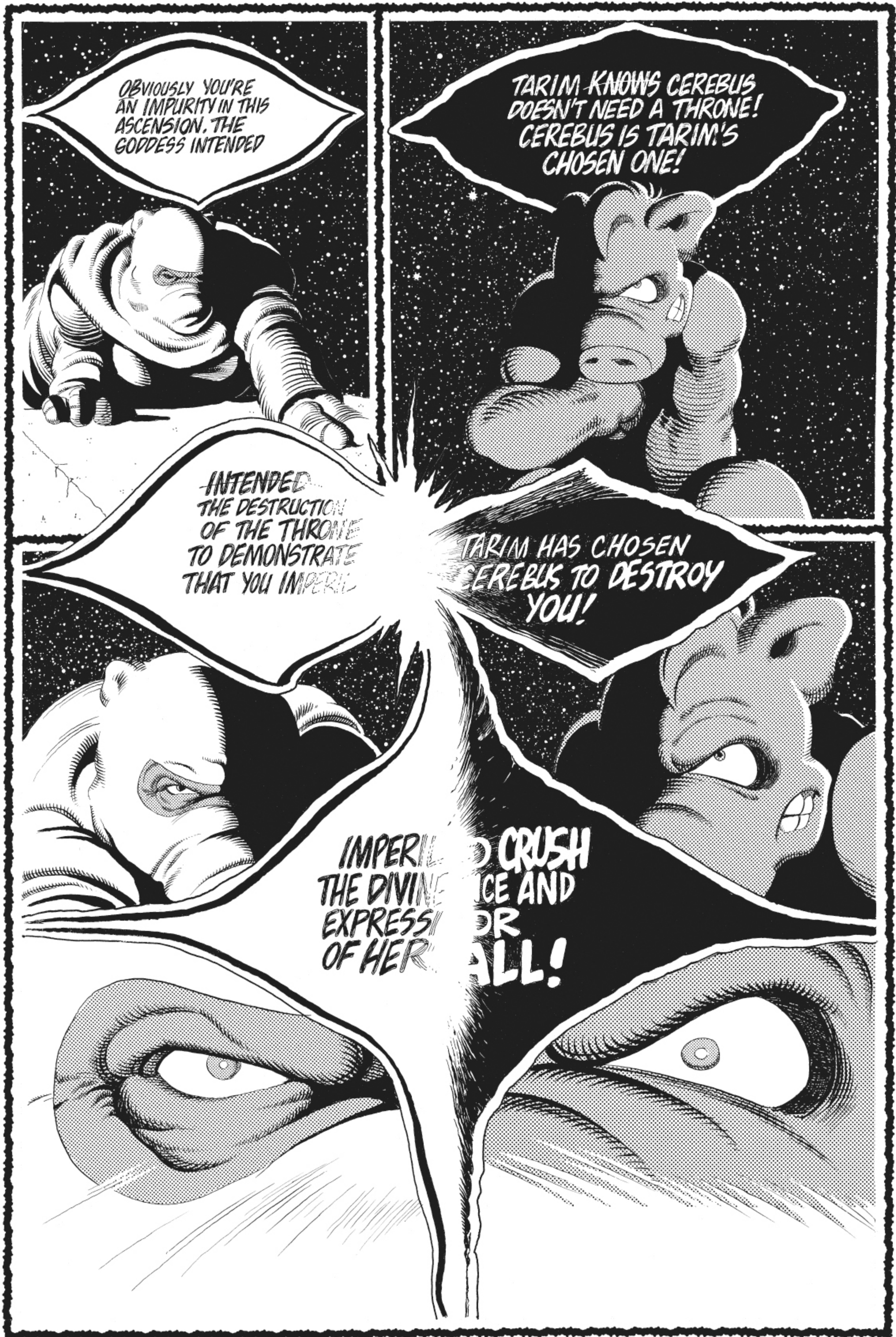
TARIM JUST
SMASHED YOUR
THRONE LIKE
A... A...



SO YOU ADMIT
THE THRONE
WAS MINE!...



THERE'S JUST NO
TALKING TO YOU
IS THERE?



OBVIOUSLY YOU'RE
AN IMPURITY IN THIS
ASCENSION. THE
GODDESS INTENDED

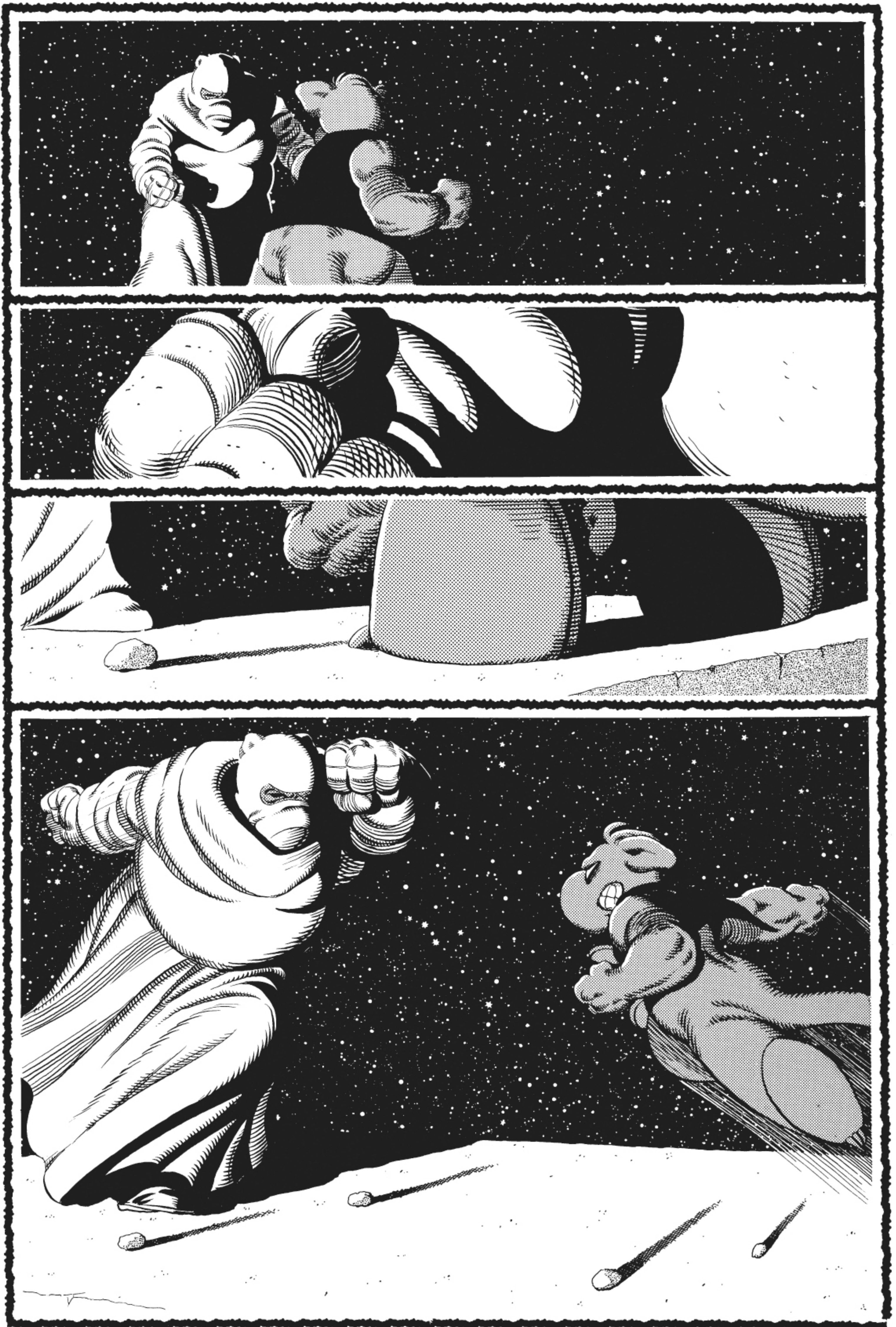
TARIM KNOWS CEREBUS
DOESN'T NEED A THRONE!
CEREBUS IS TARIM'S
CHOSEN ONE!

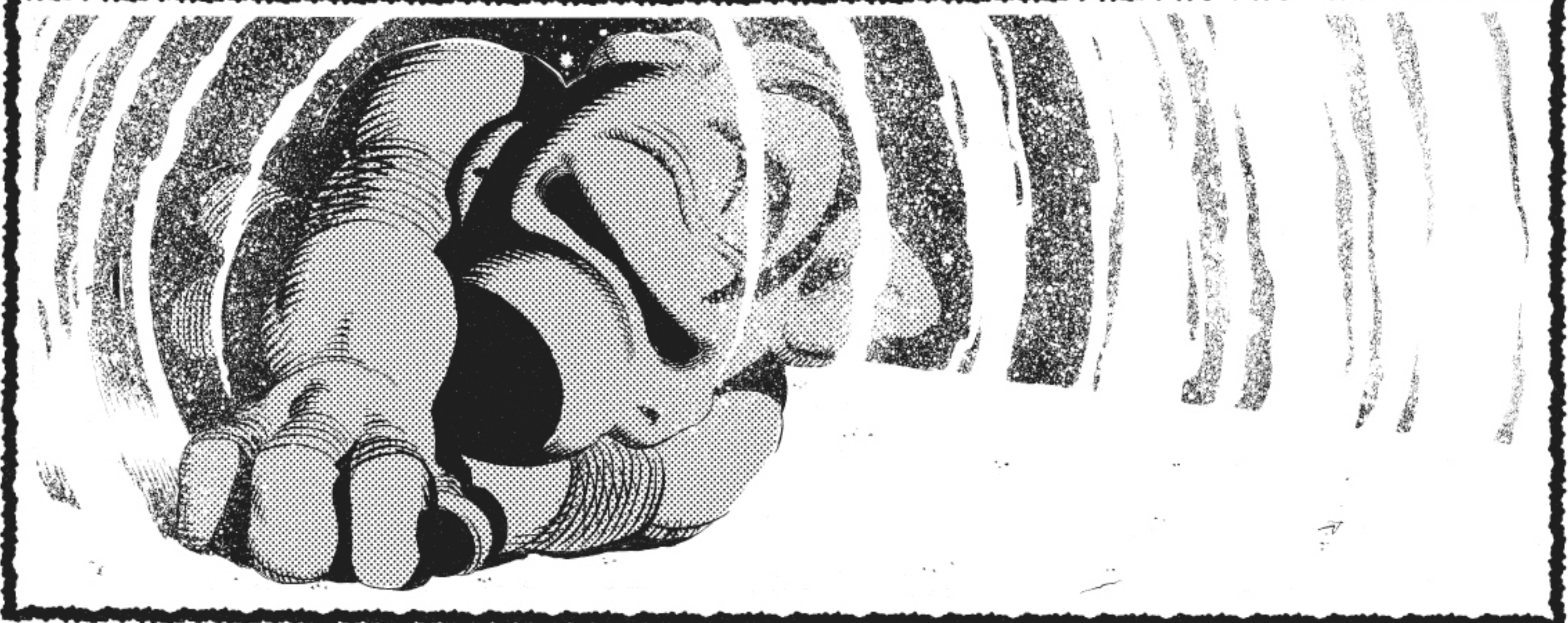
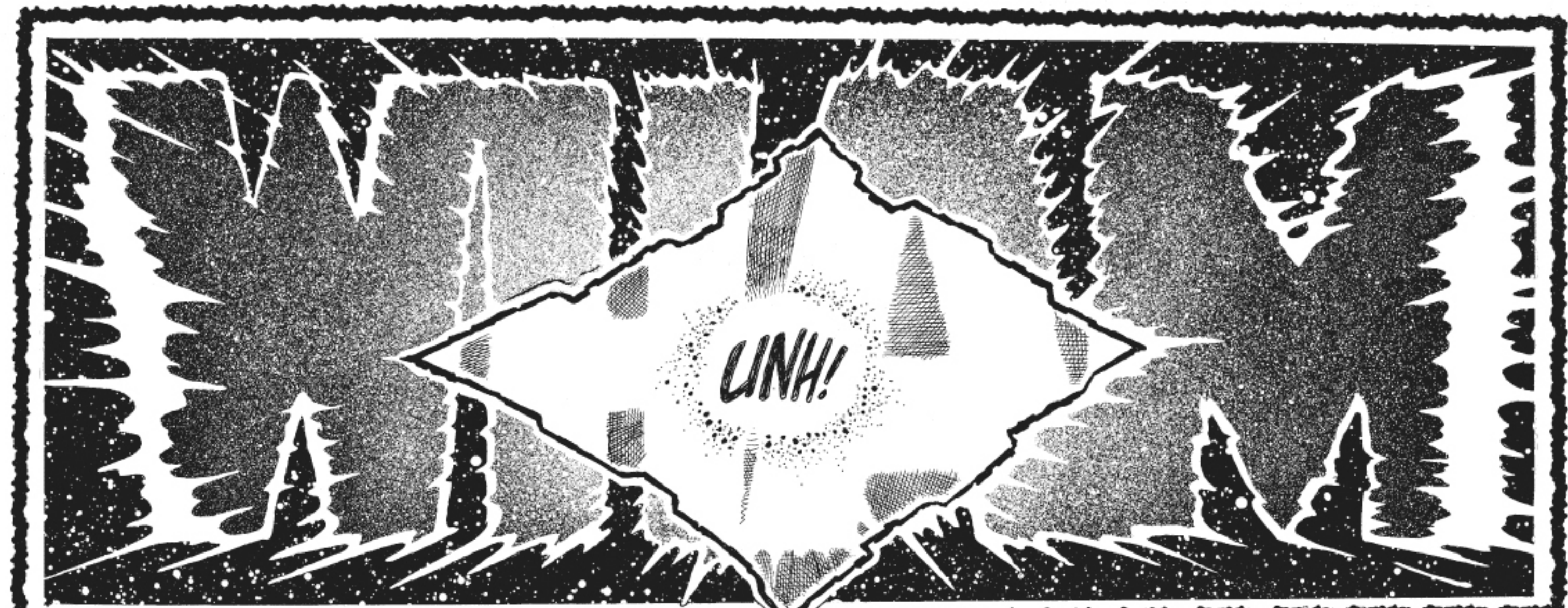
~~INTENDED~~
THE DESTRUCTION
OF THE THRONE
TO DEMONSTRATE
THAT YOU IMPERIL

TARIM HAS CHOSEN
CEREBUS TO DESTROY
YOU!

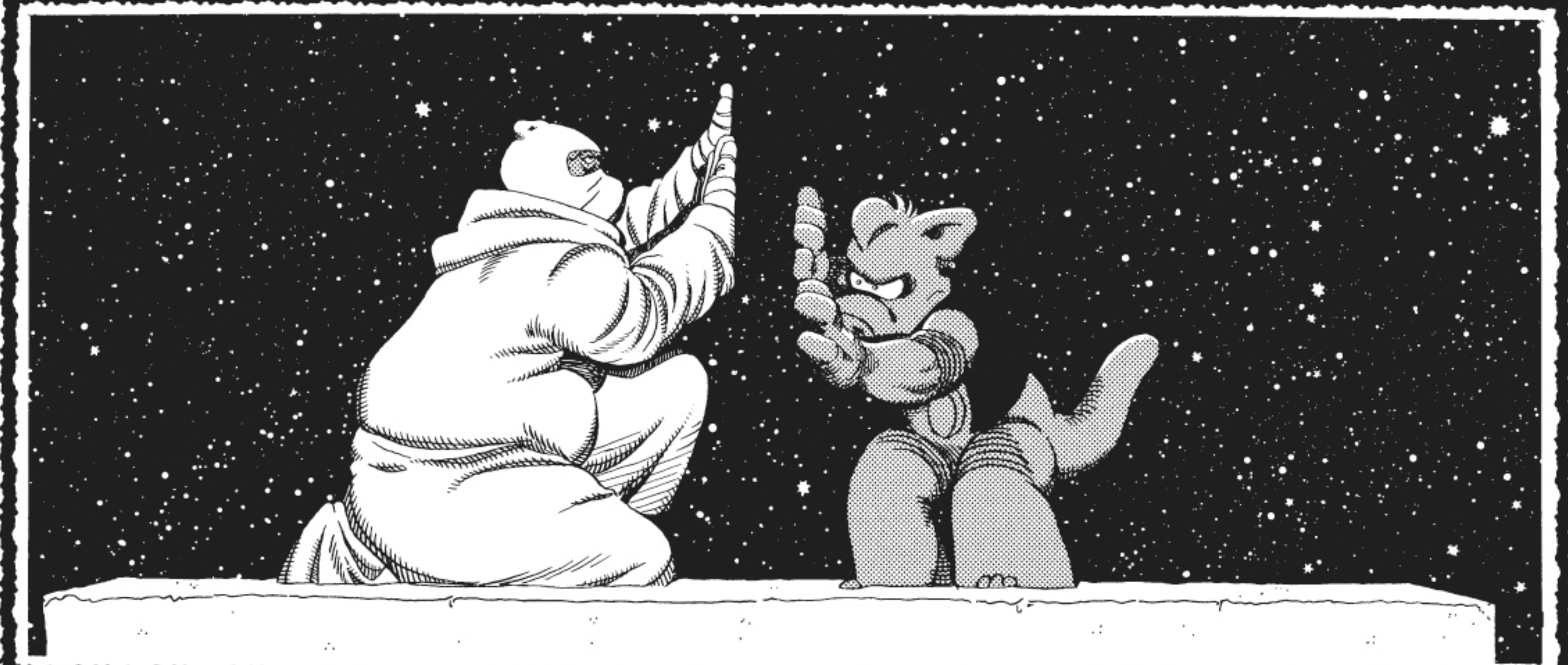
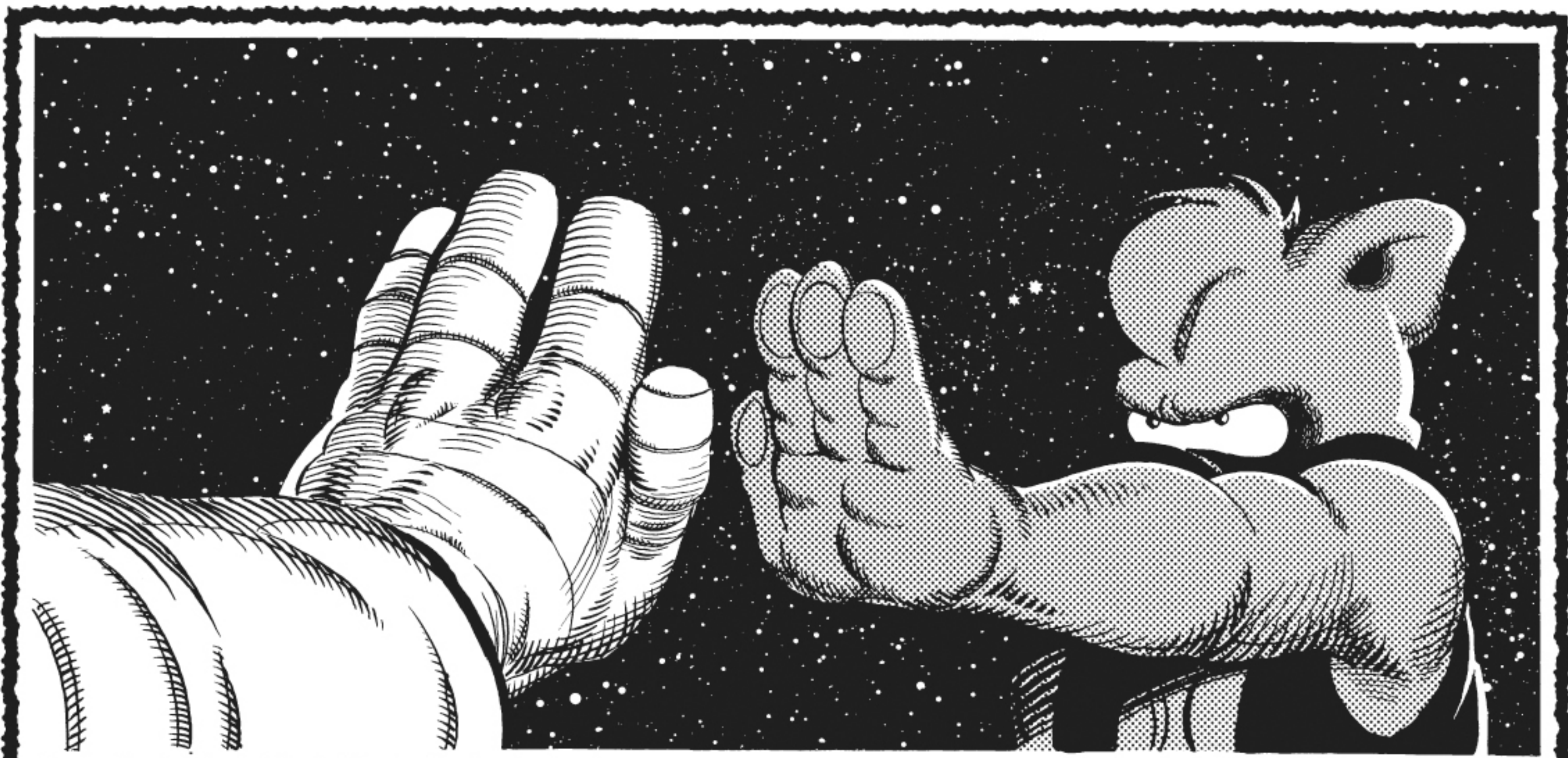
IMPERIL TO CRUSH
THE DIVINE FORCE AND
EXPRESSION OF HER
WILL!



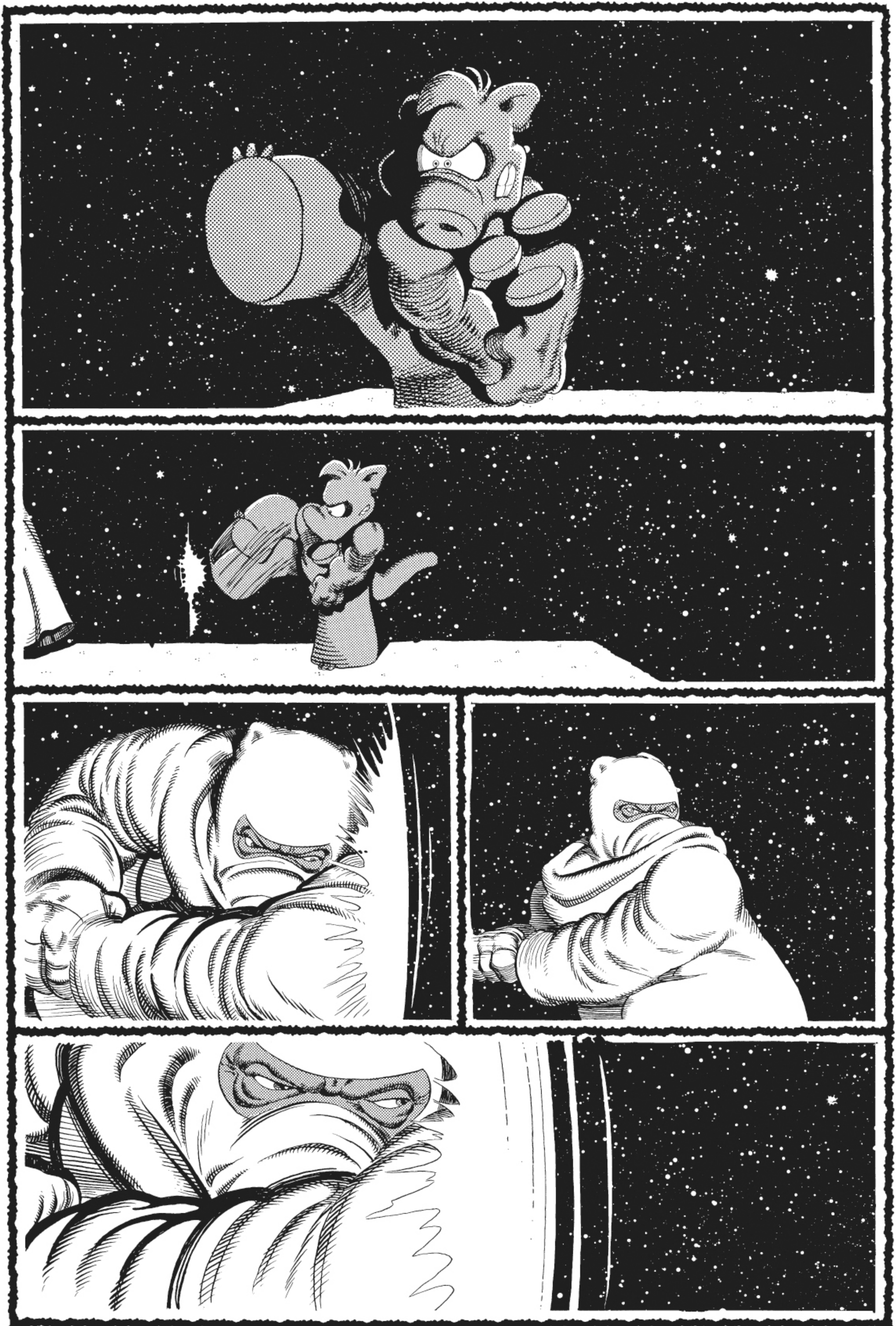


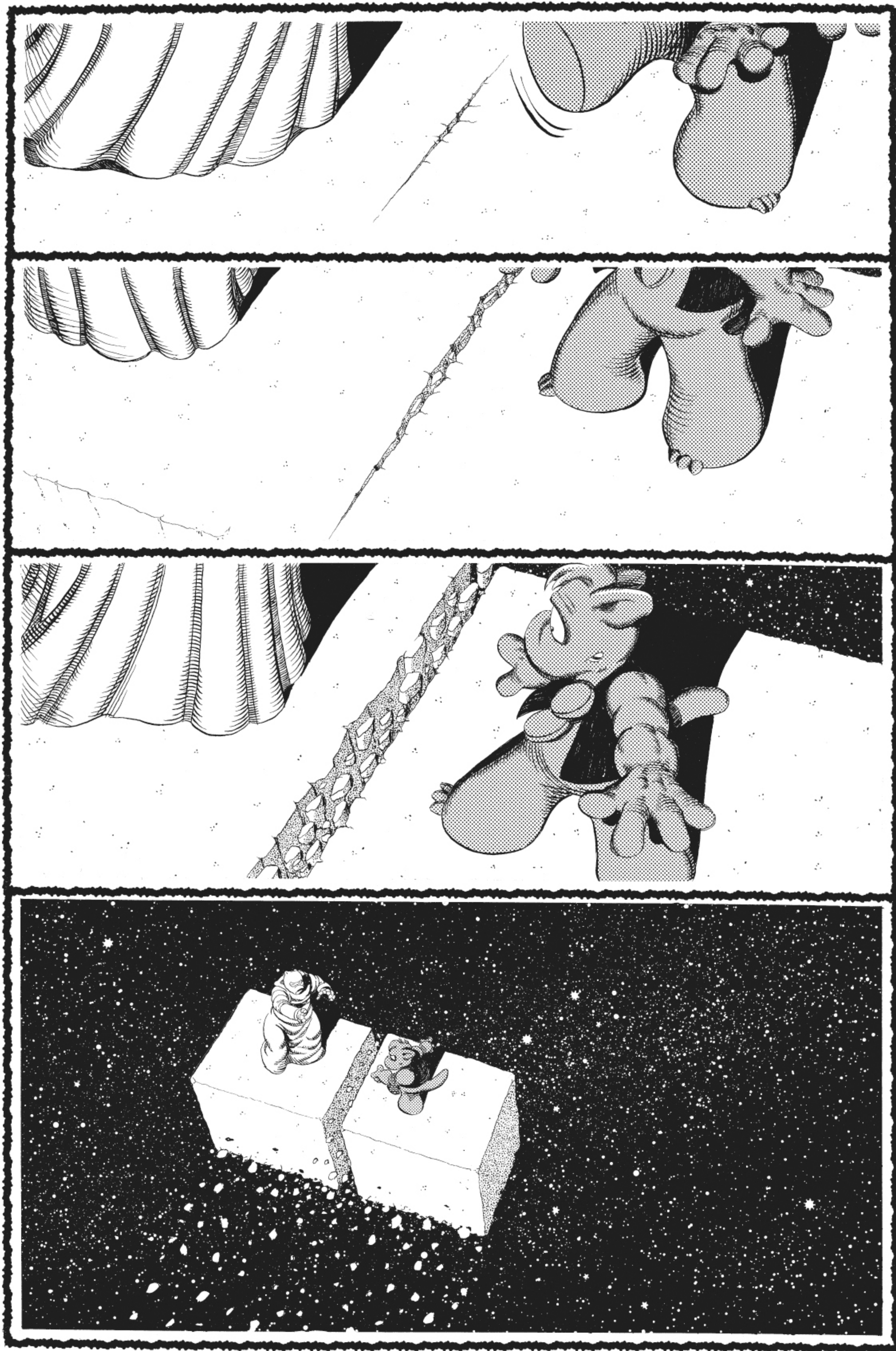


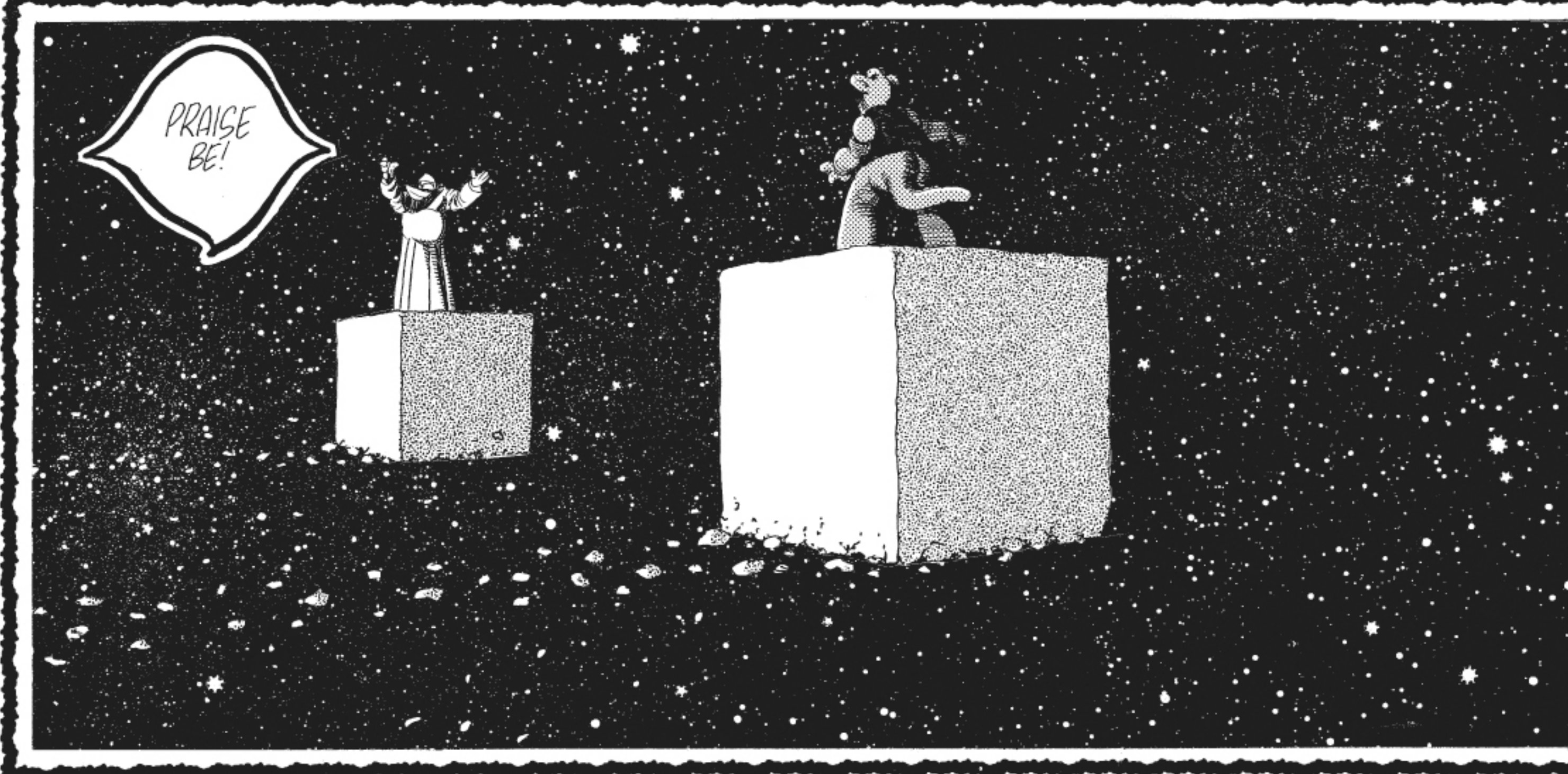
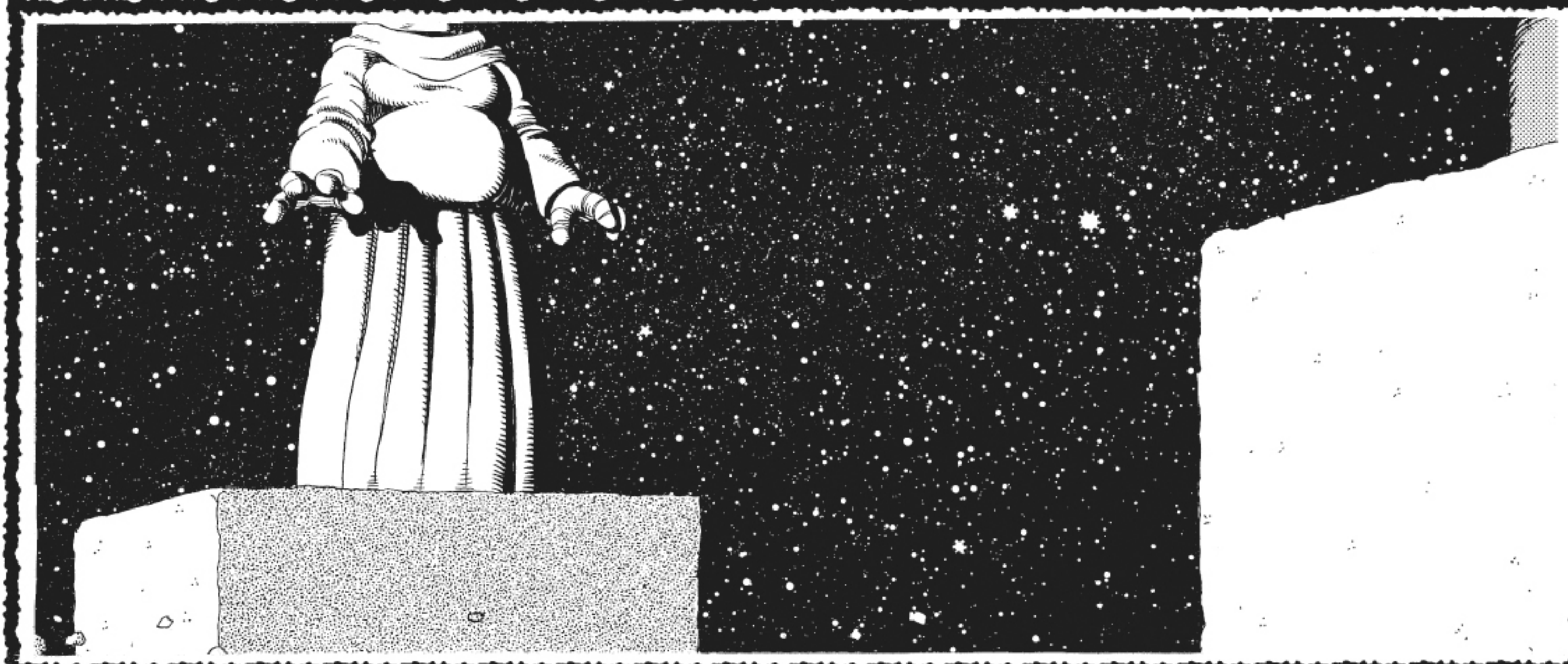


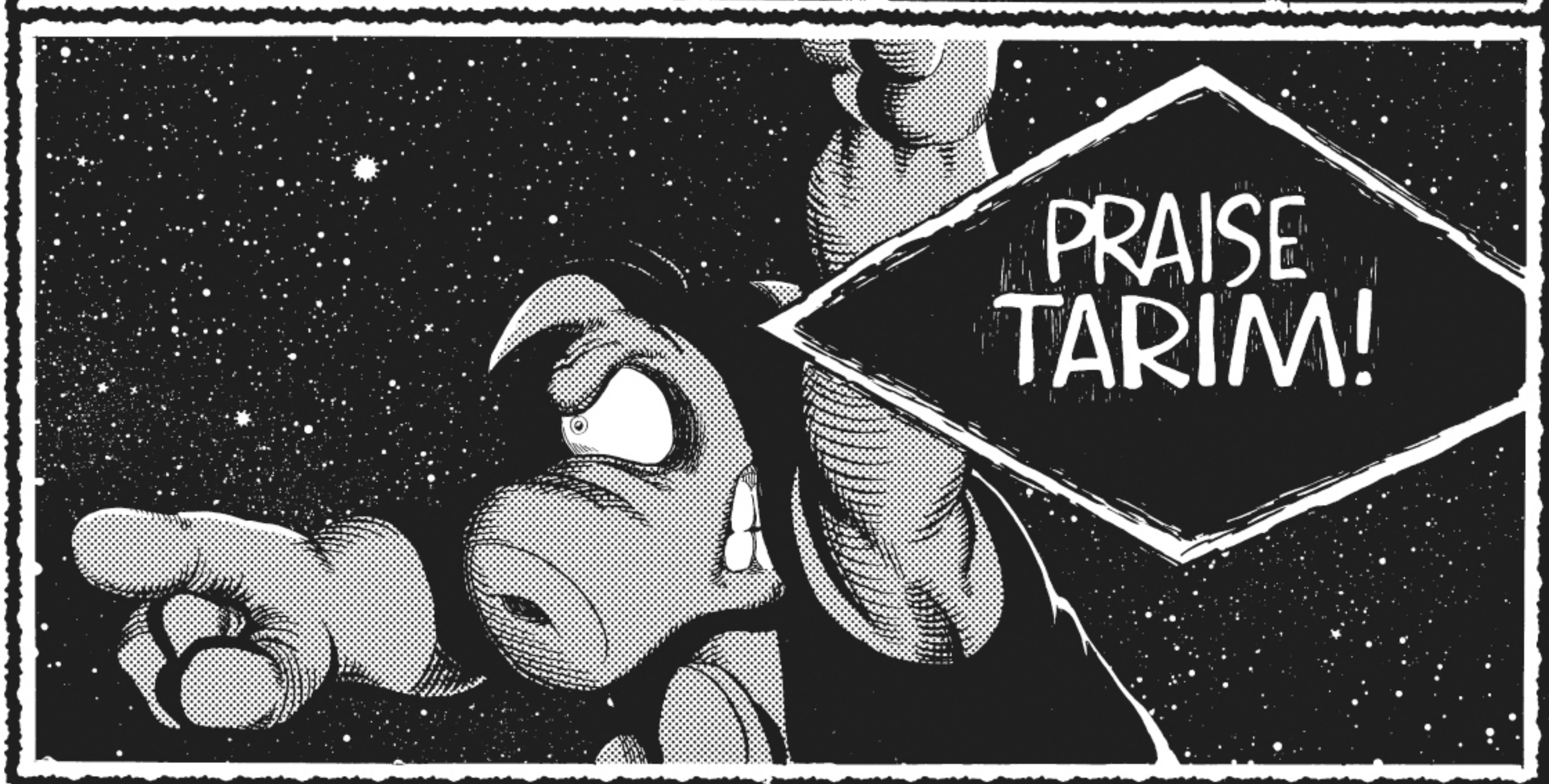
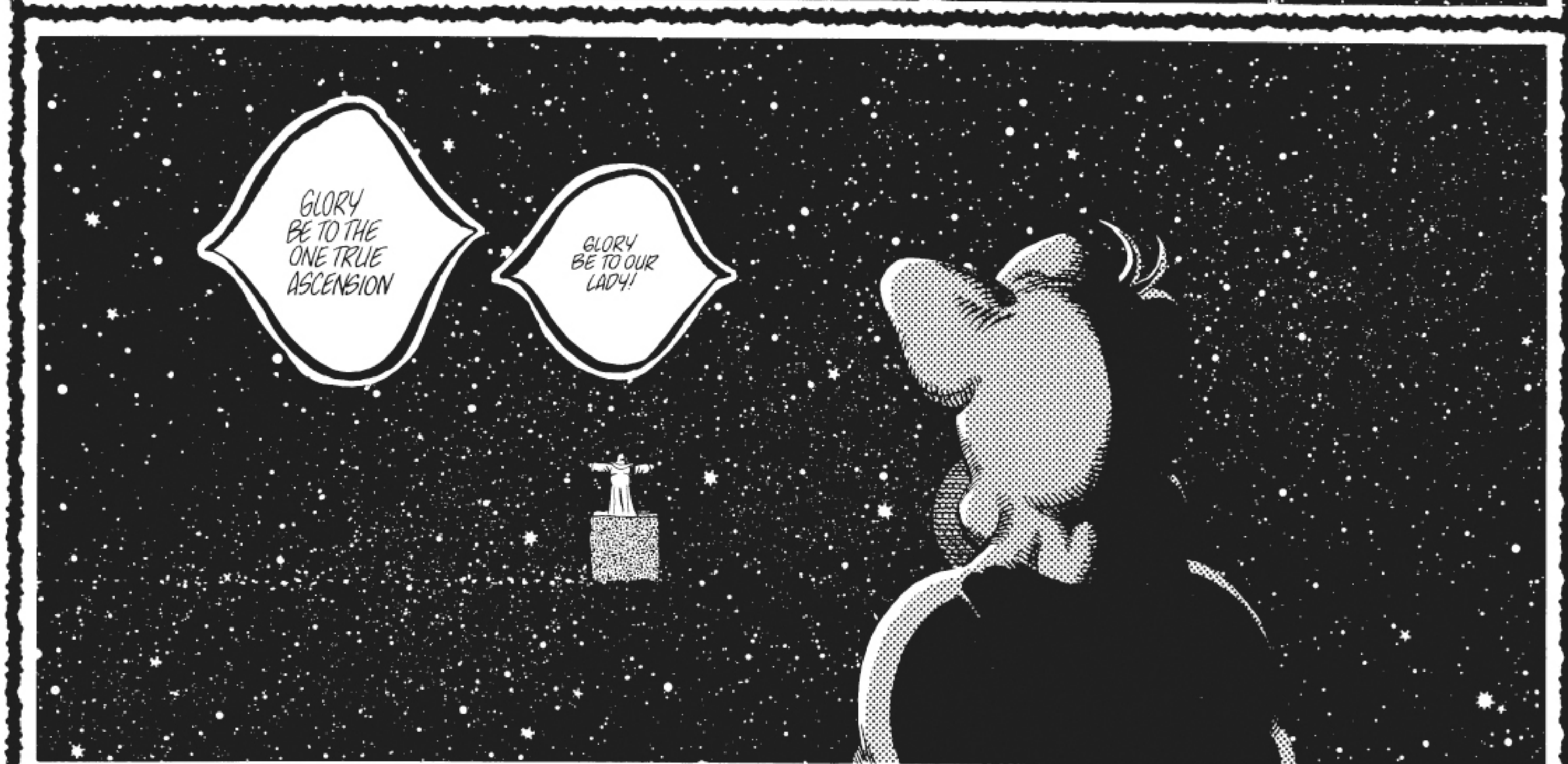
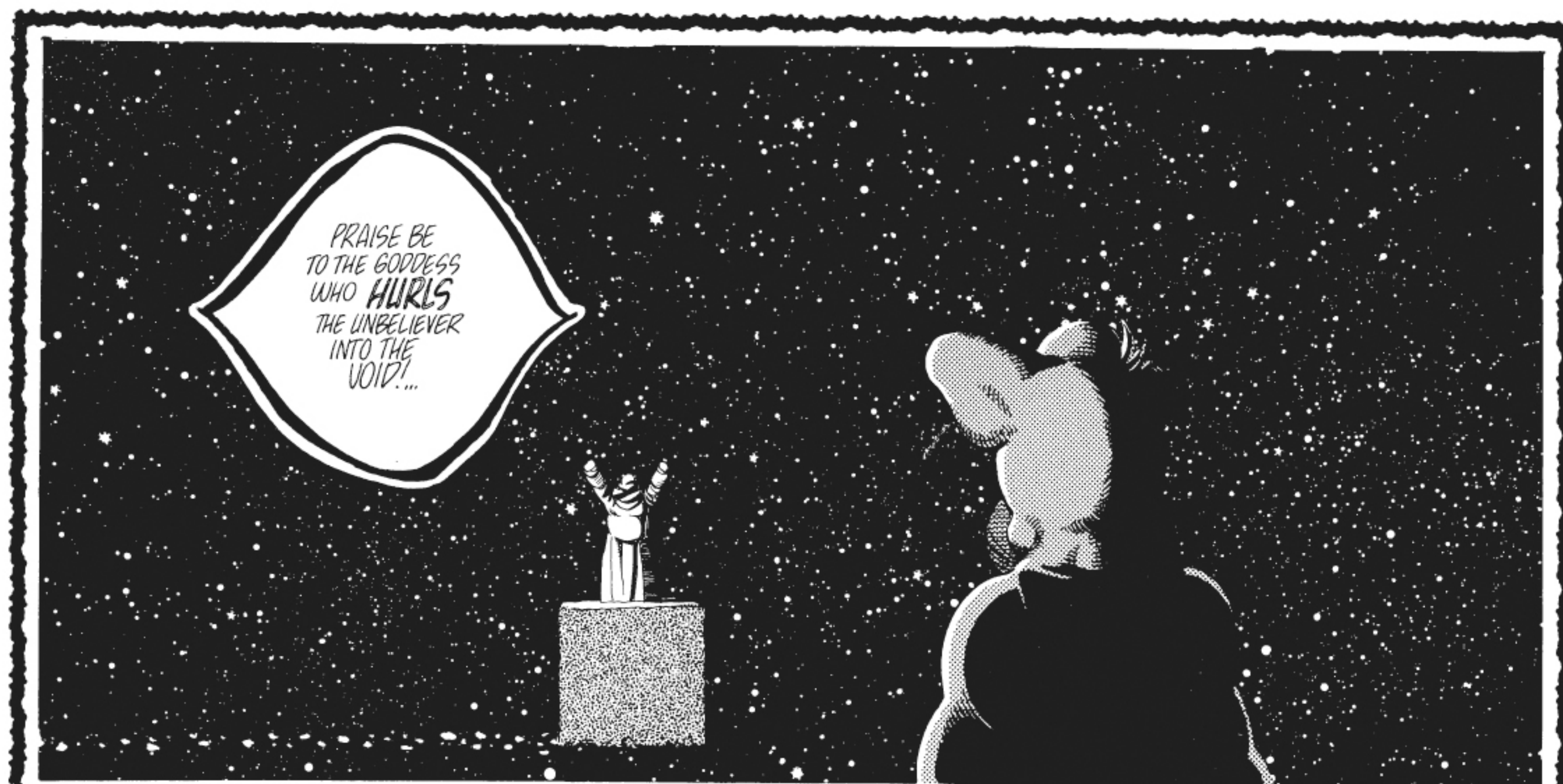












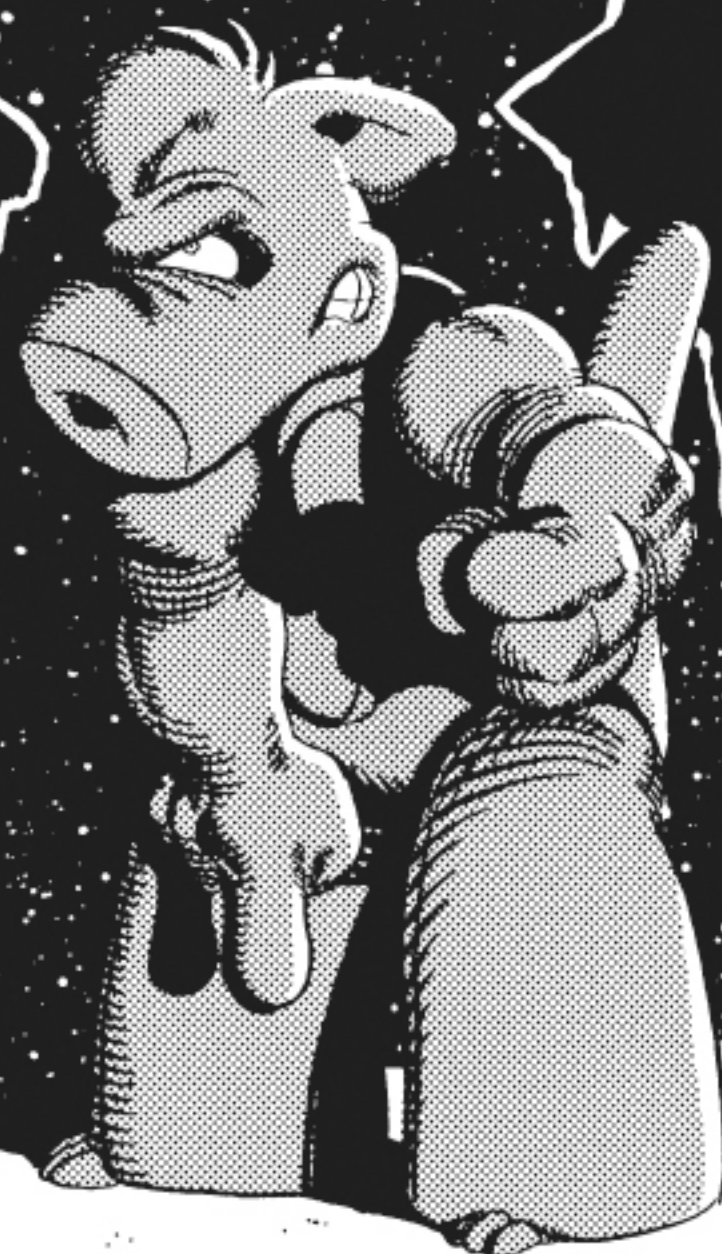
PRAISE
HIS
INFINITE
POWER!



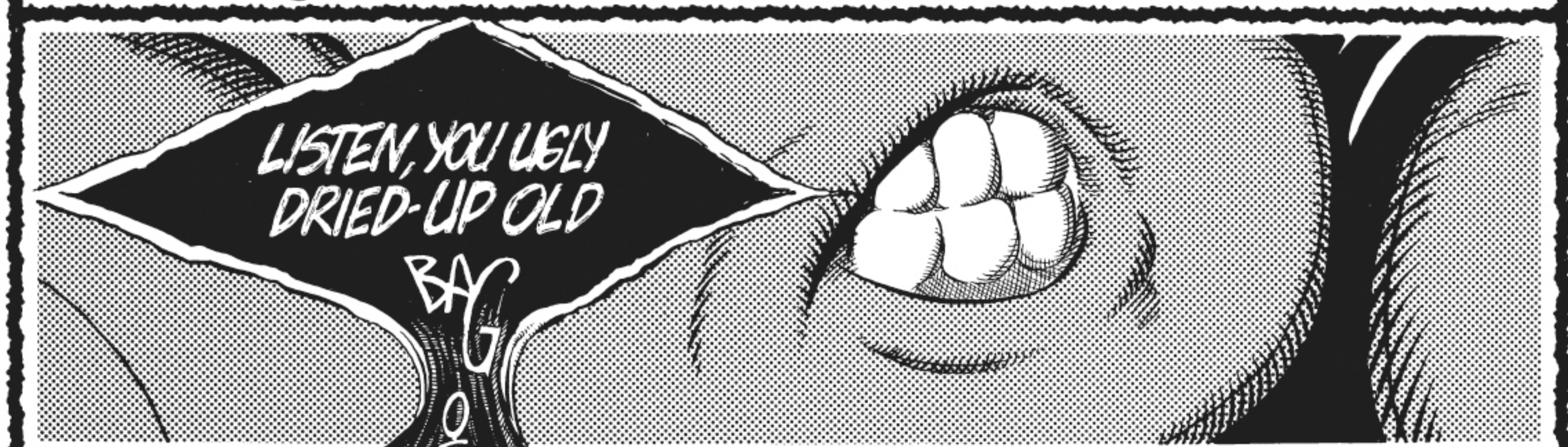
PRAISE
HIS
MERCILESS
REIGN OF

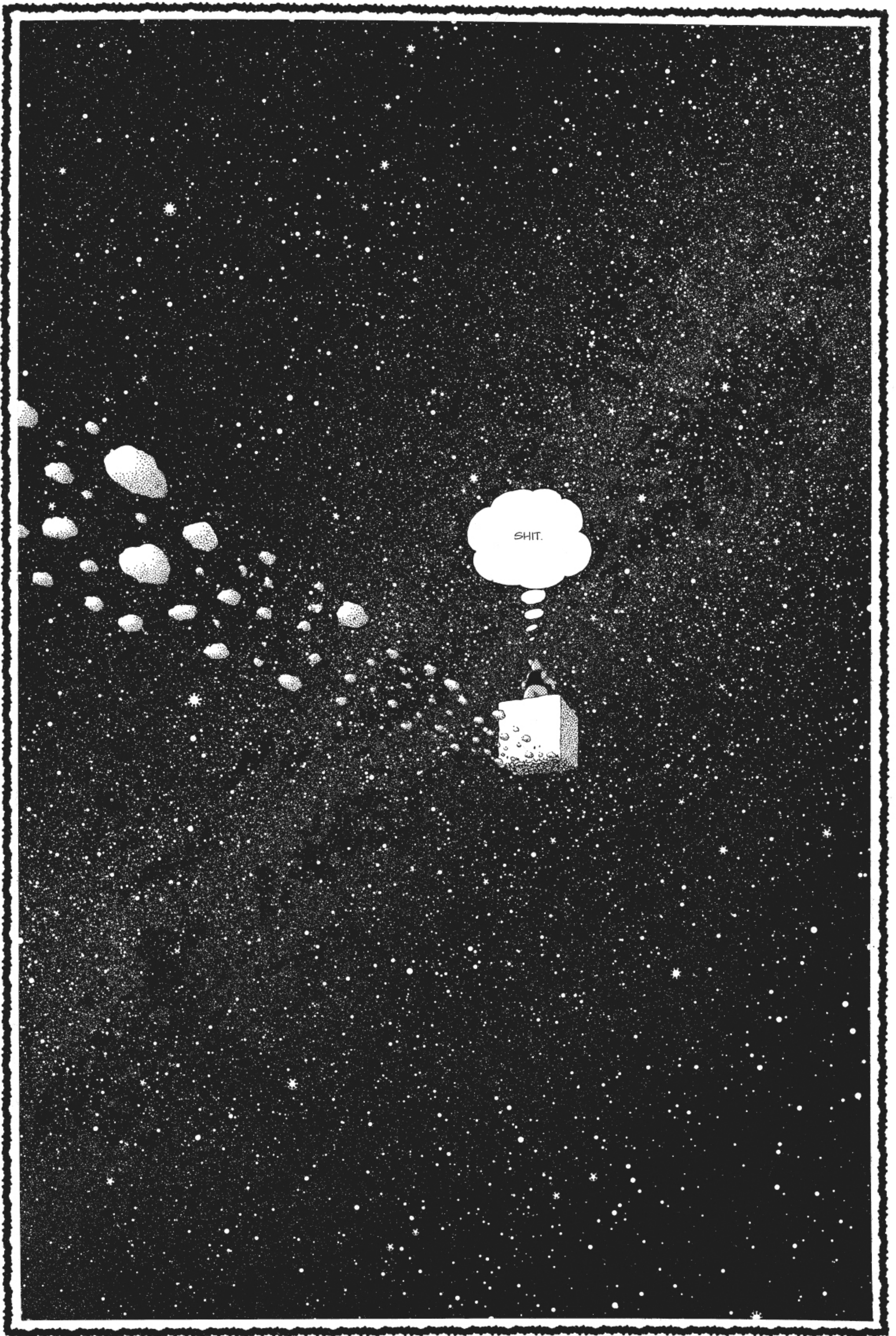


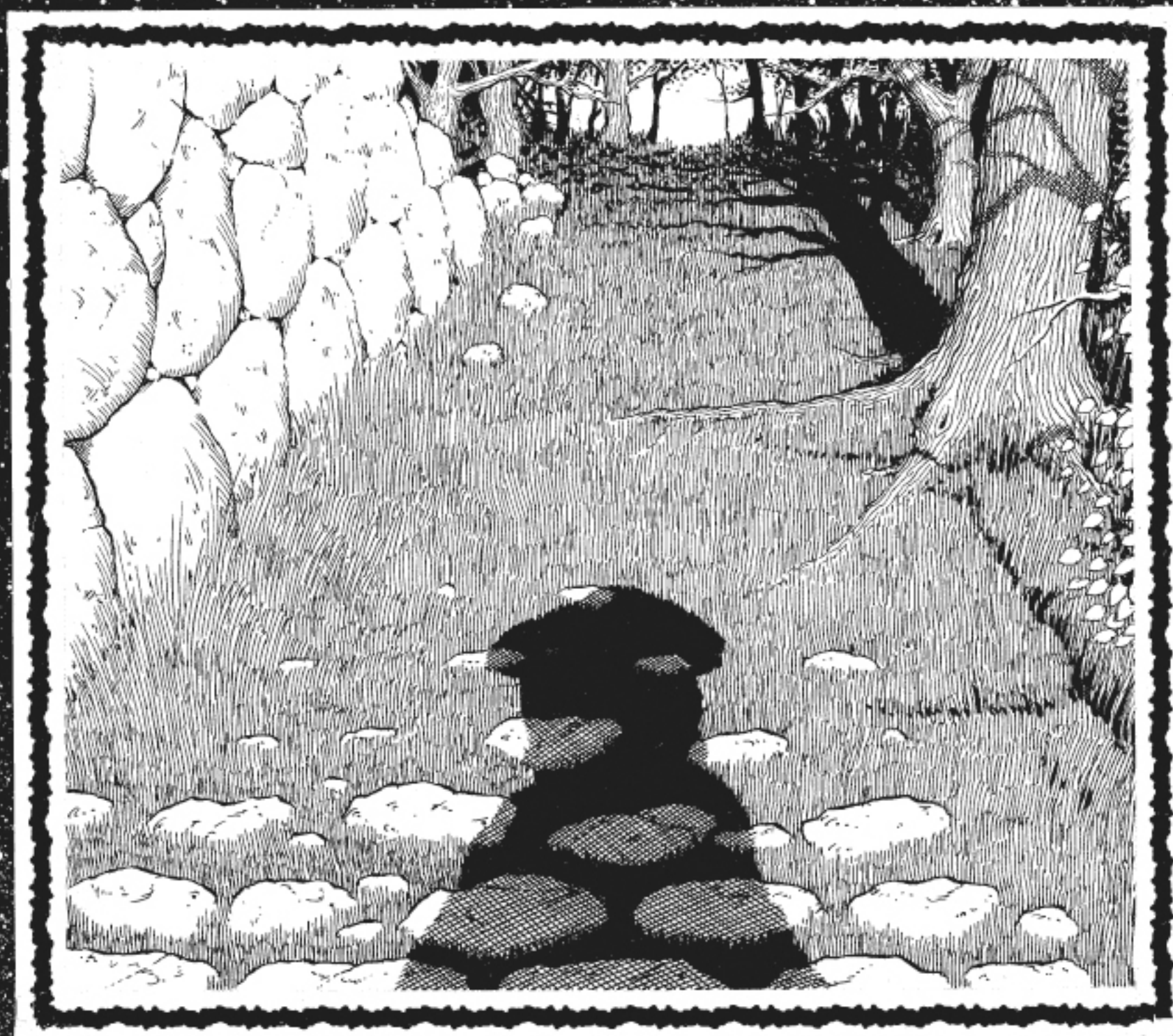
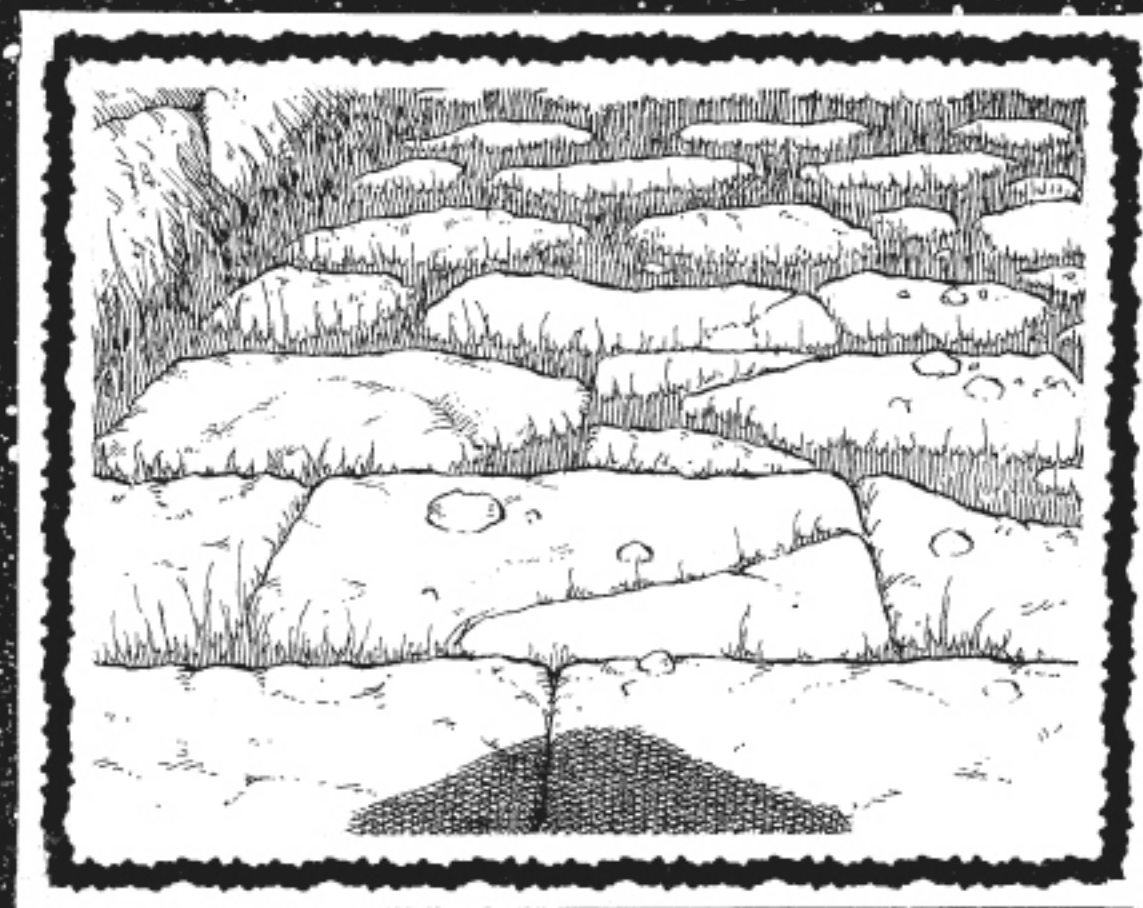
OH
YEAH?!

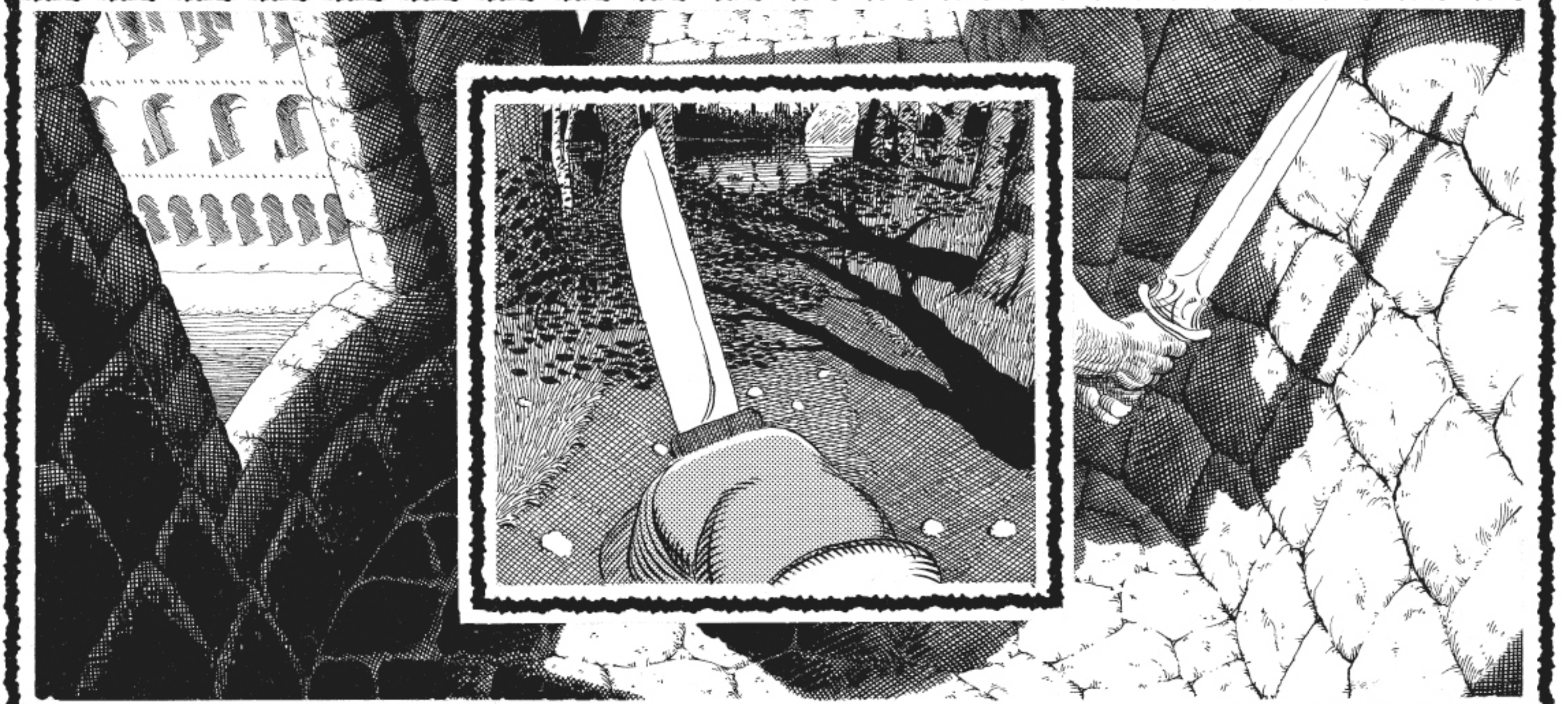
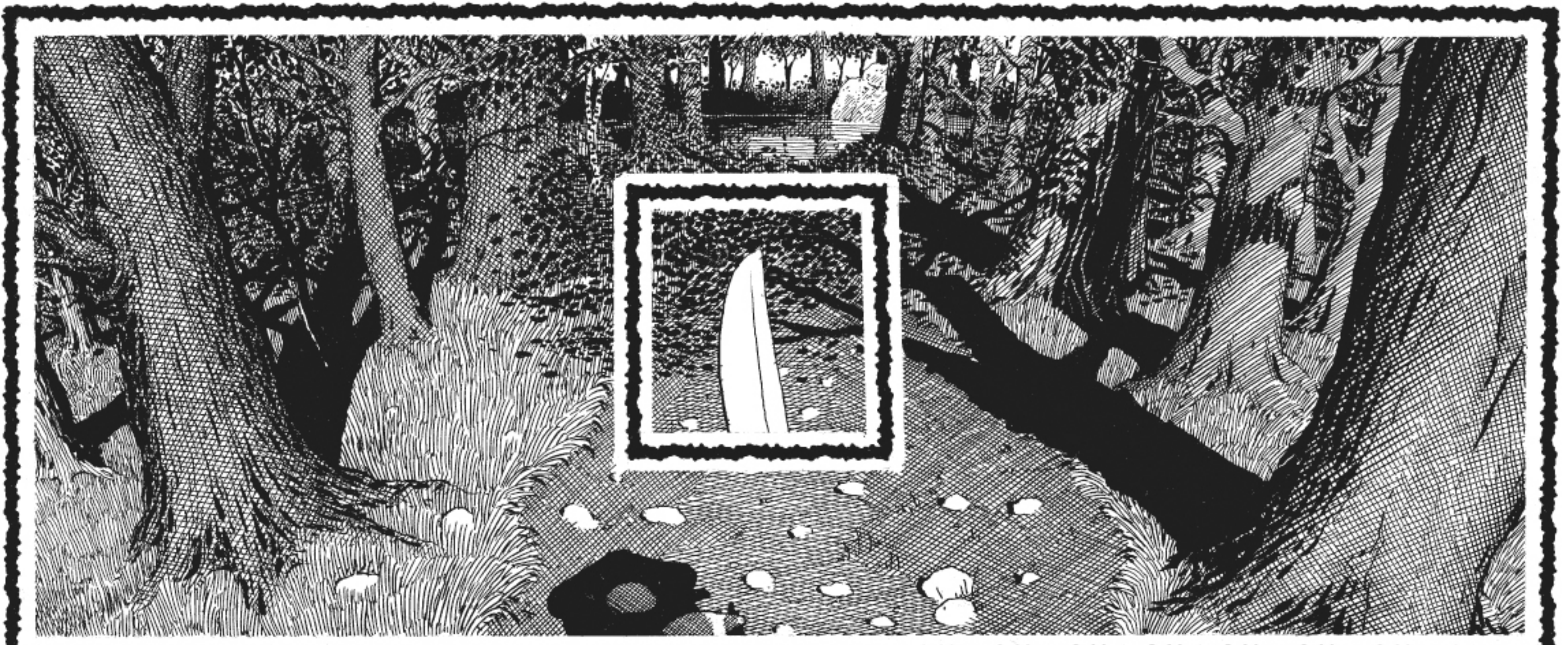


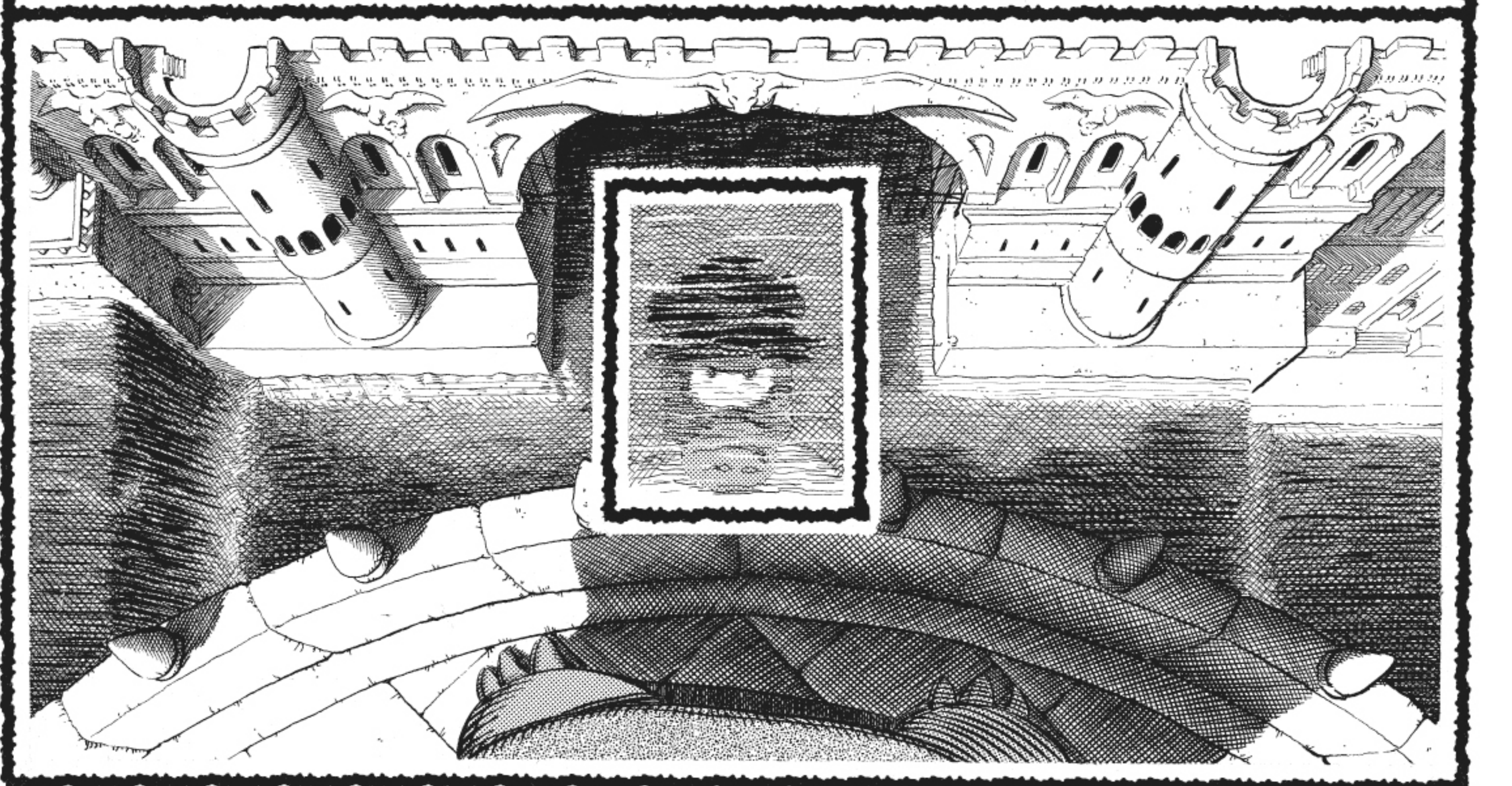
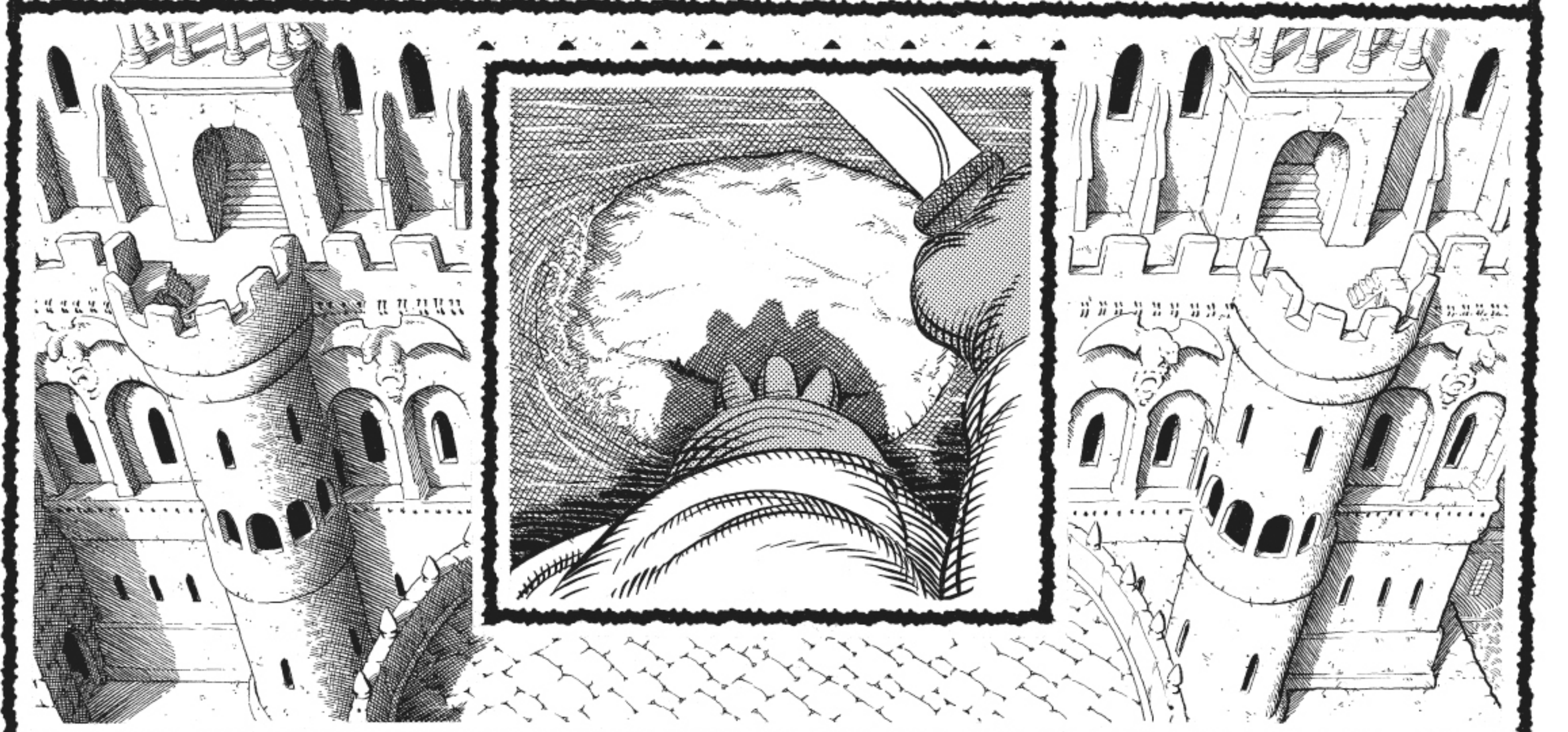
WHY DON'T YOU
COME OVER
HERE
AND SAY
THAT?!

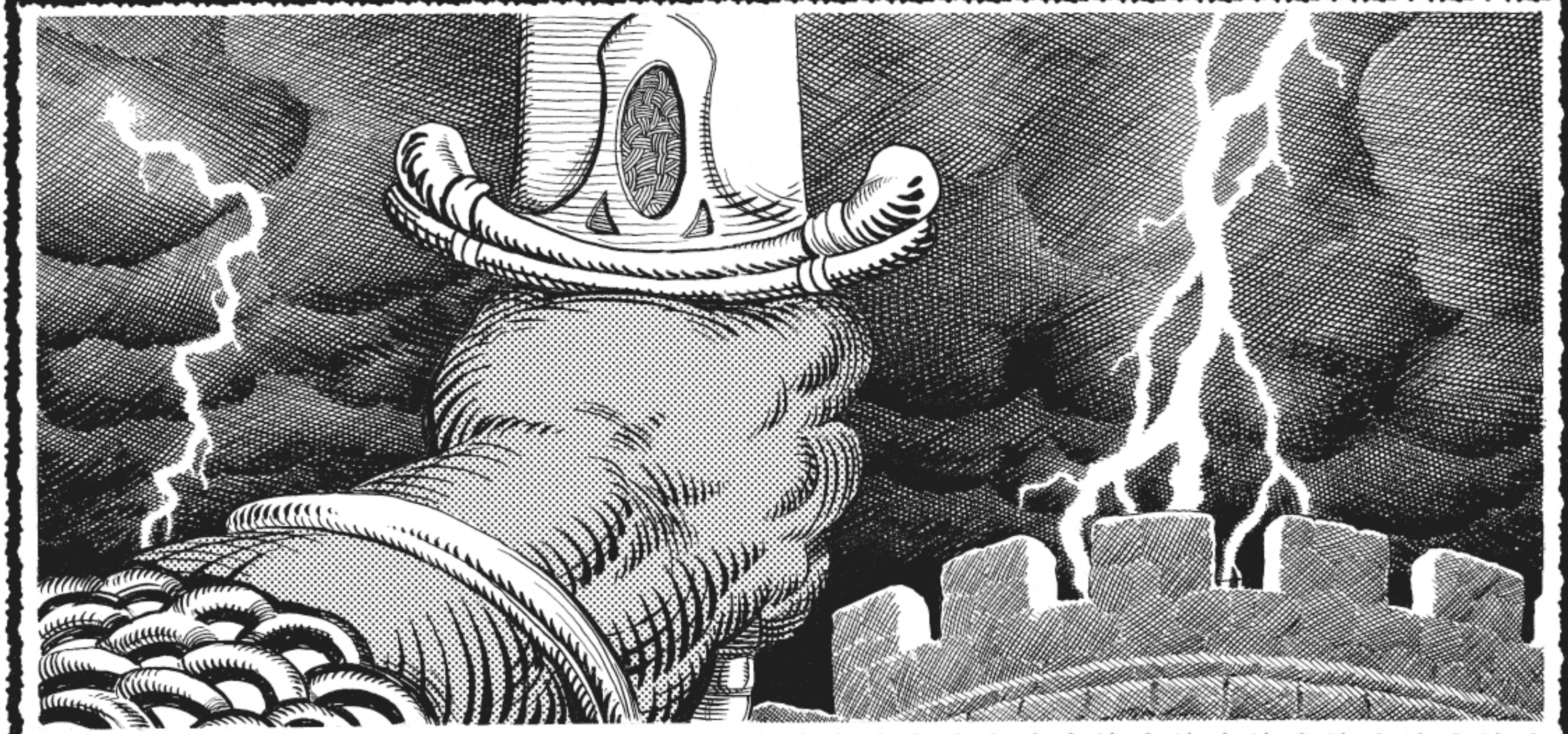
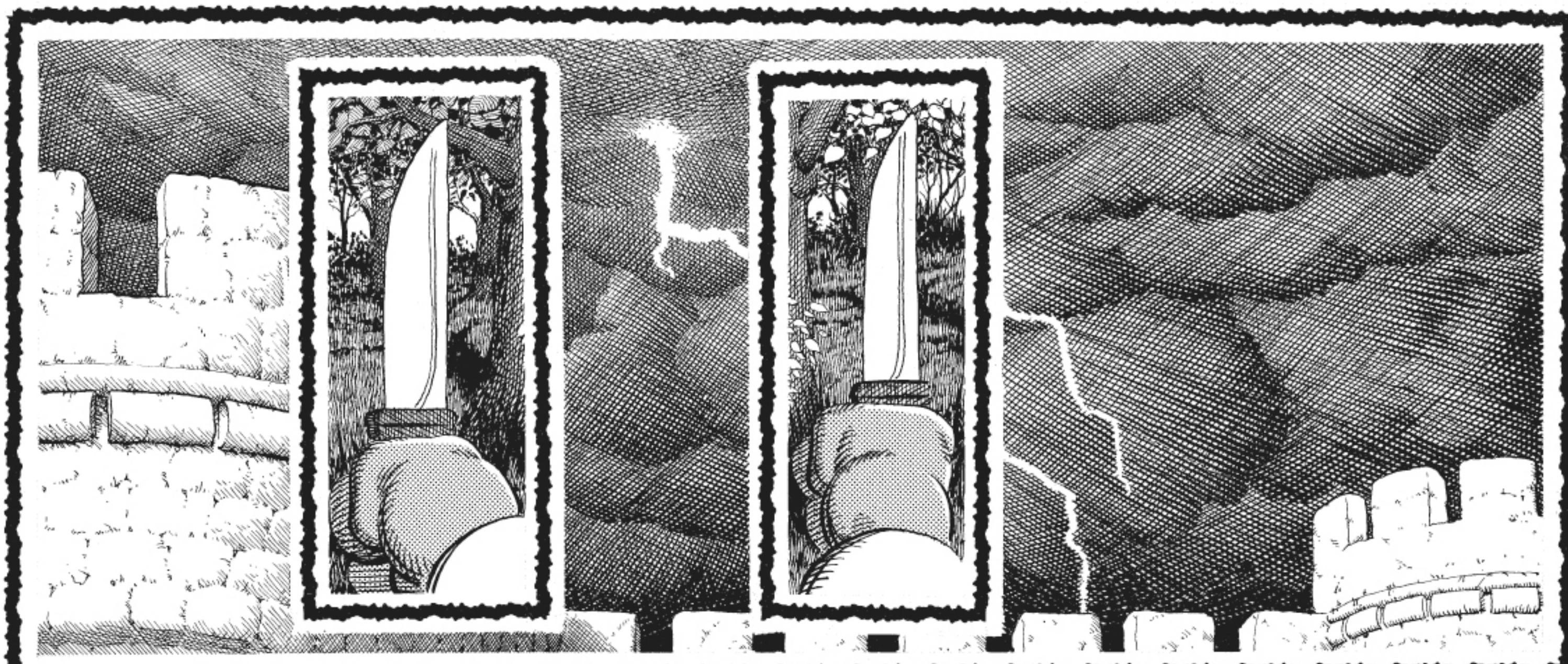


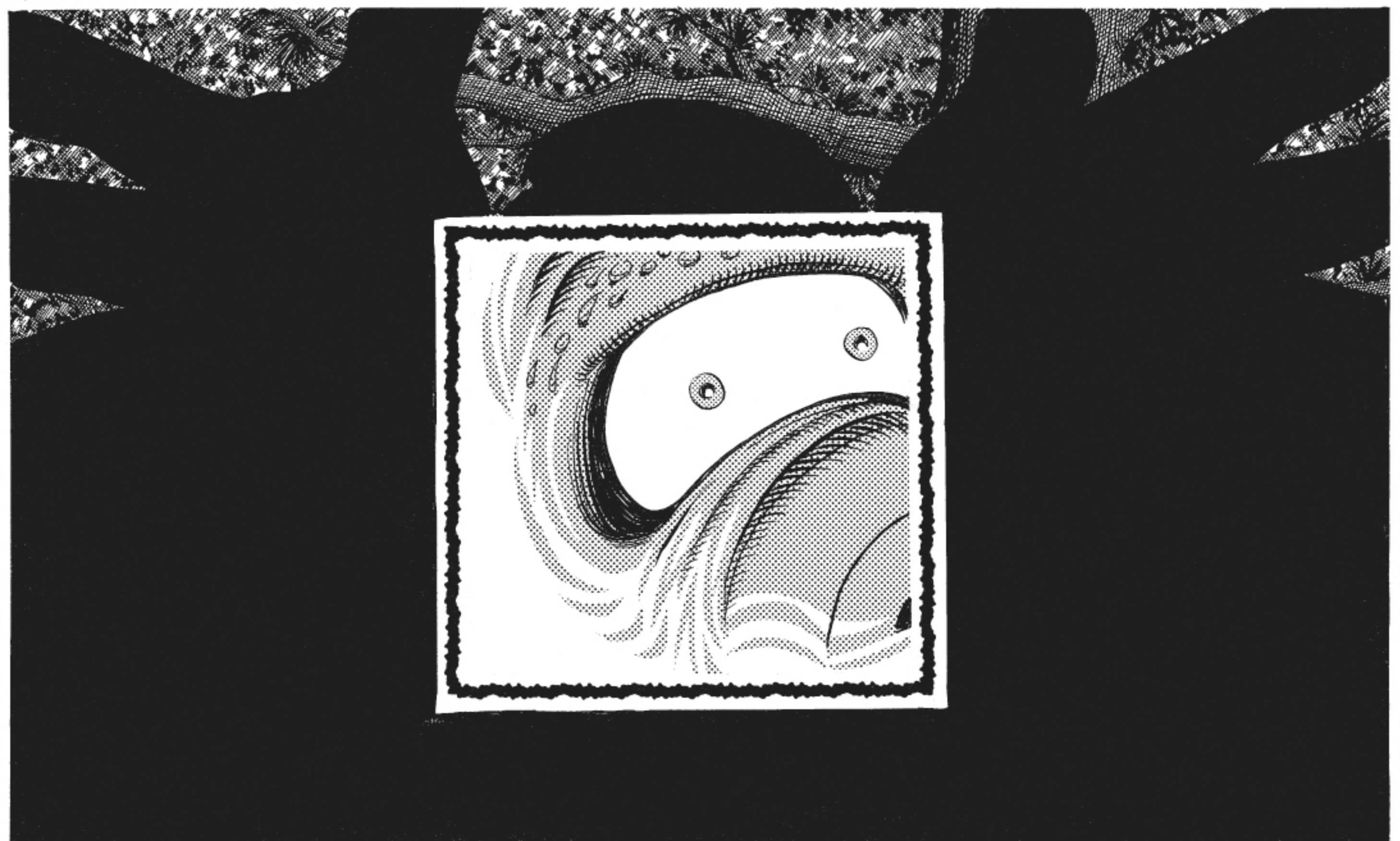
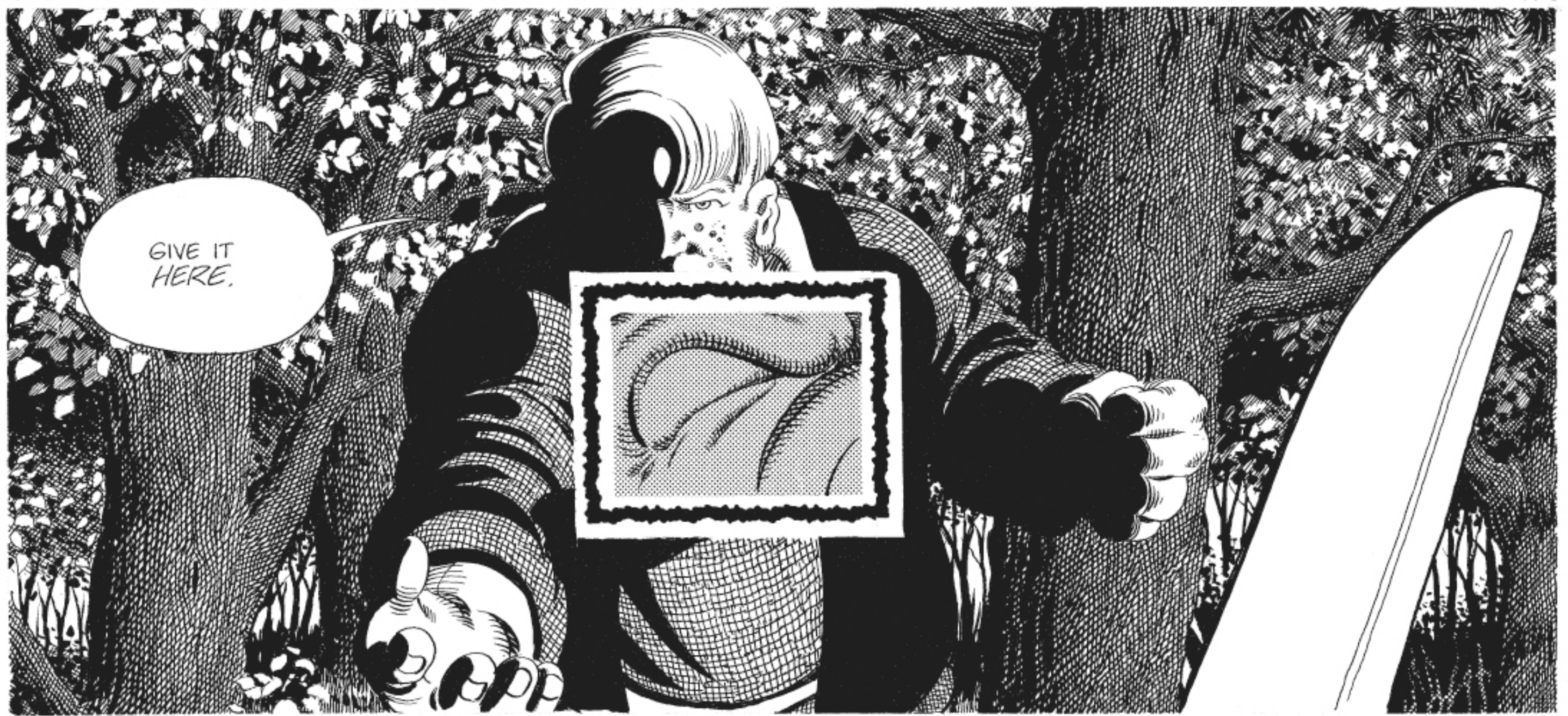


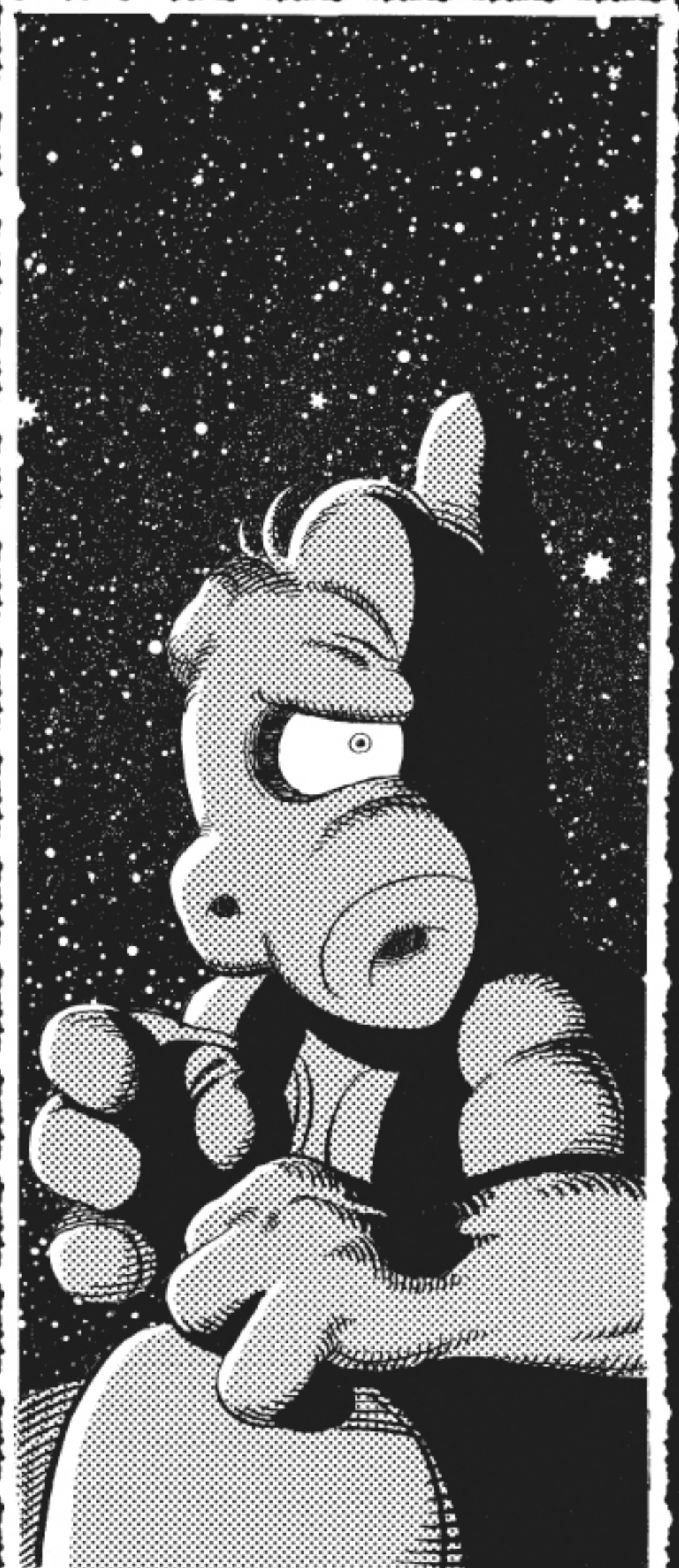
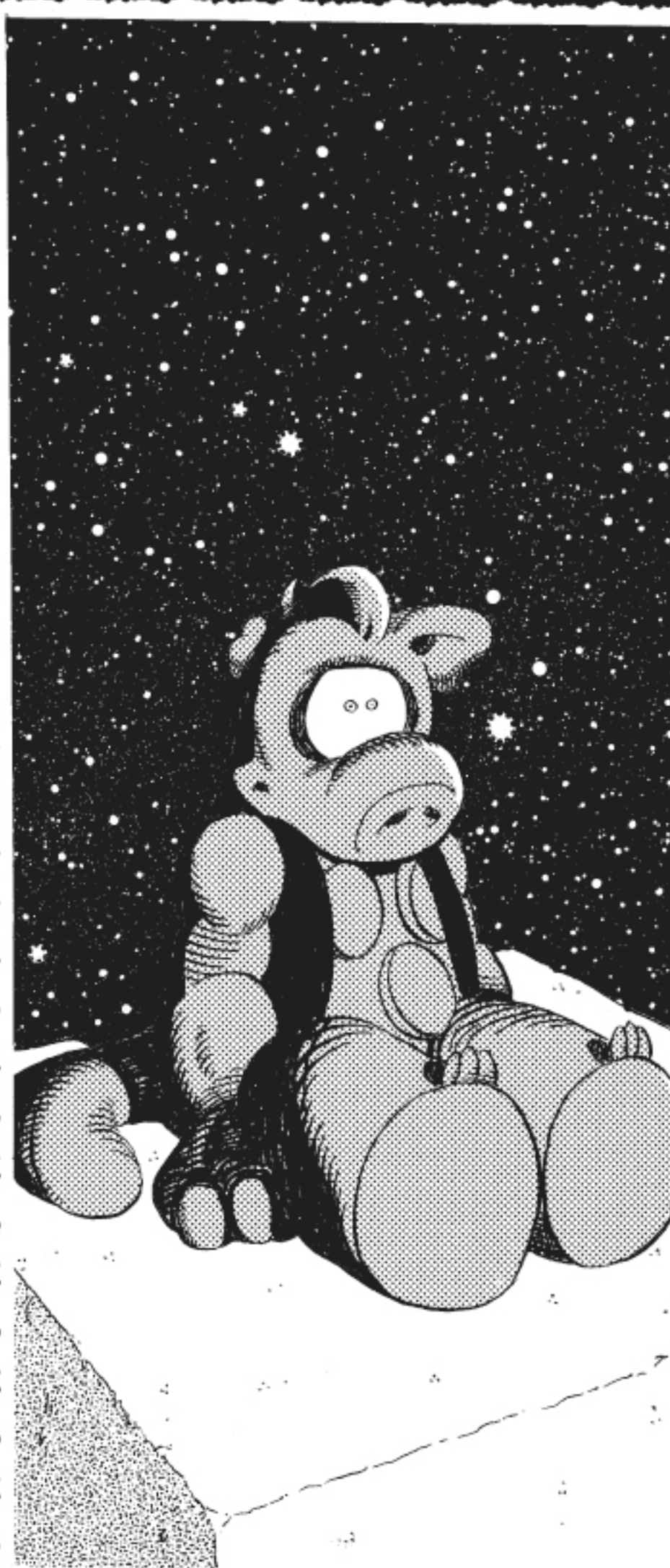
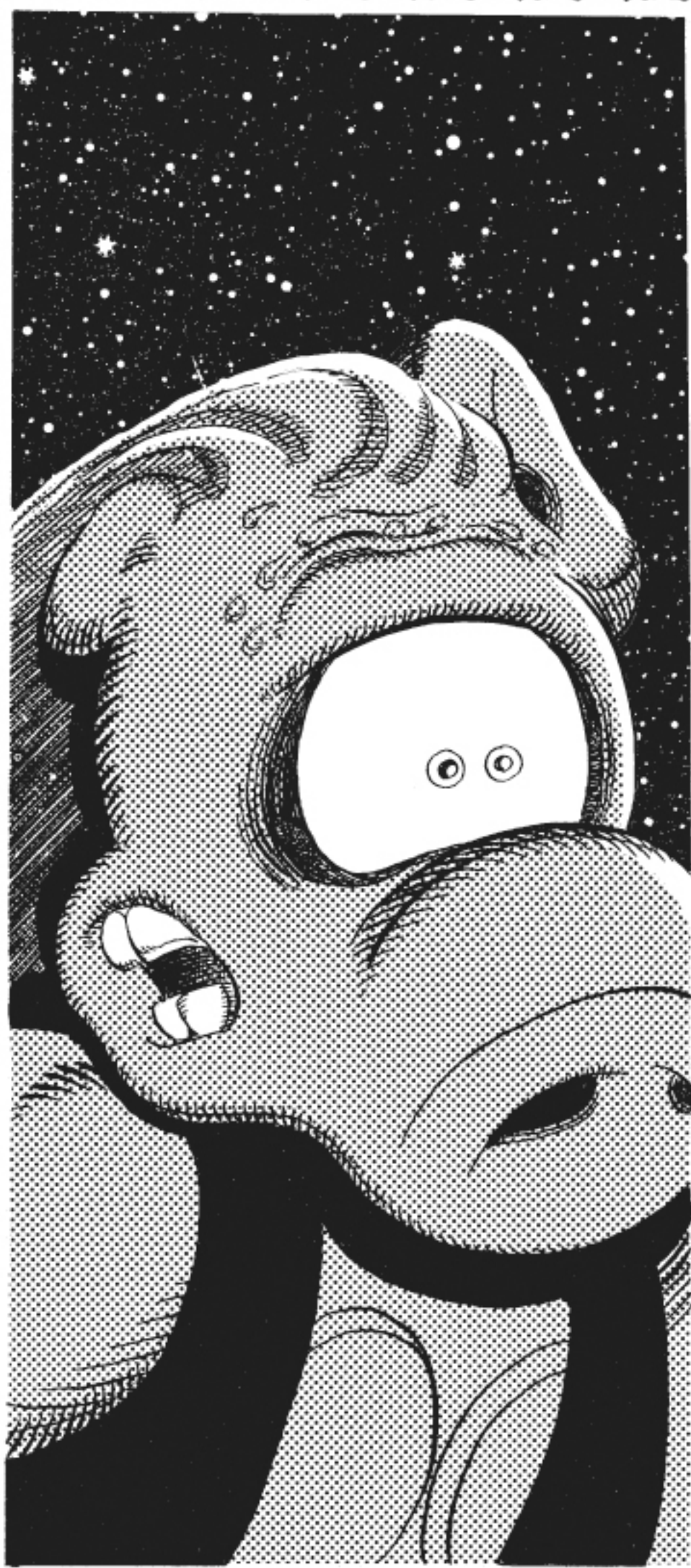












AN'..... NOW
TREVOR'S GOT
MUM'S KITCHEN
KNIFE, TARIM.



SH-SHE TOLD
CEREBUS NOT TO
TAKE IT OUT OF
THE H-HOUSE.

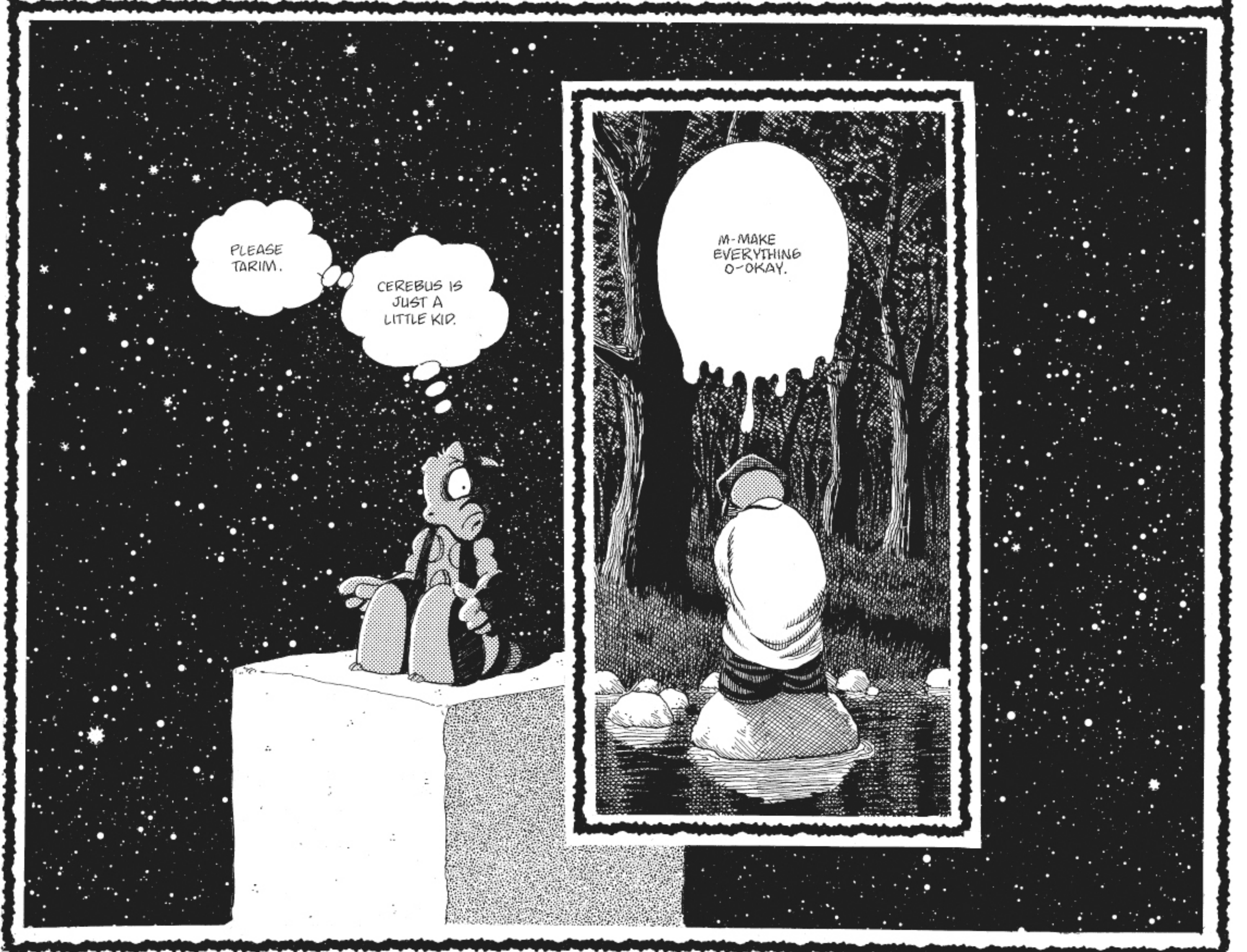
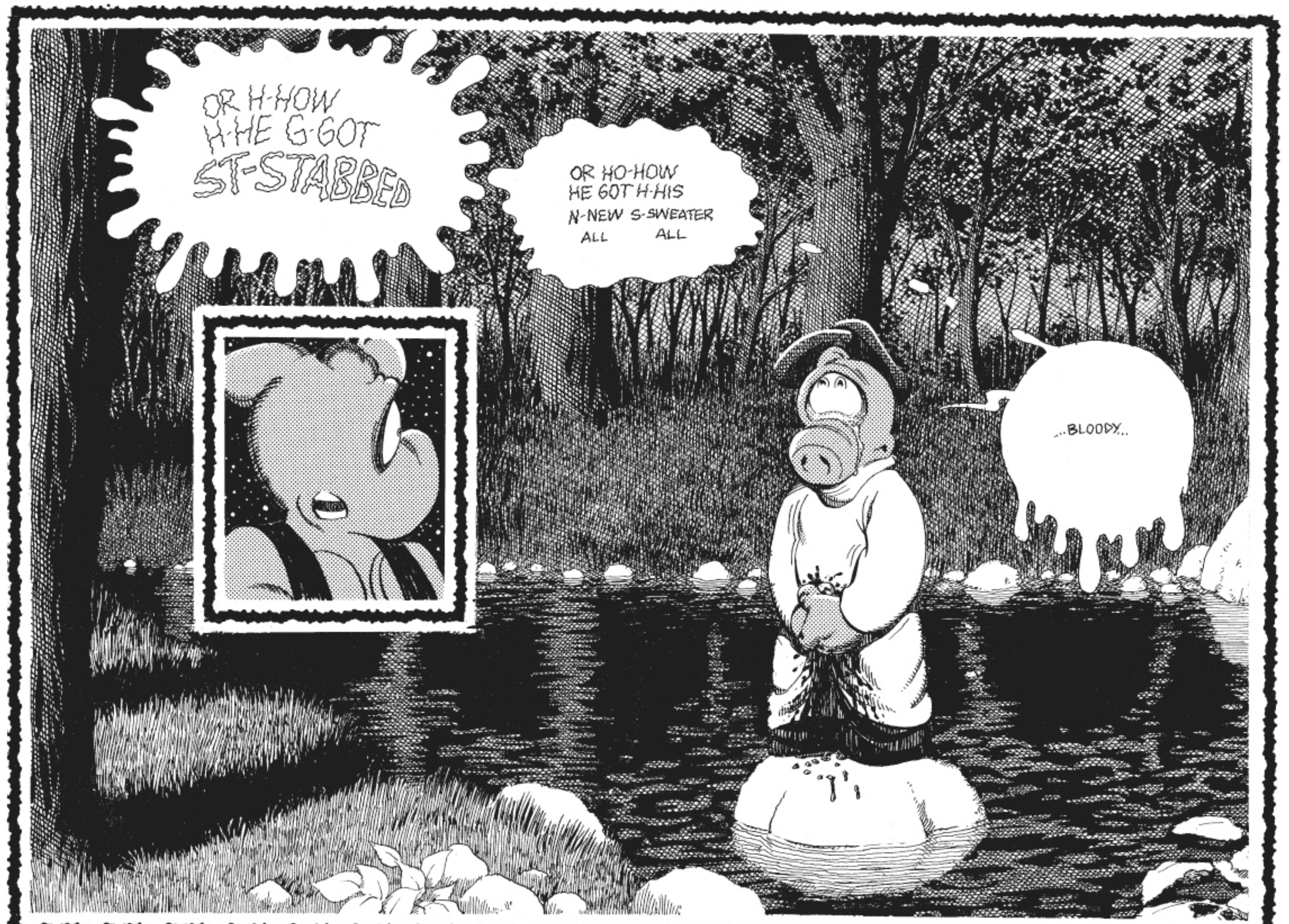
AN' CEREBUS
D-DID

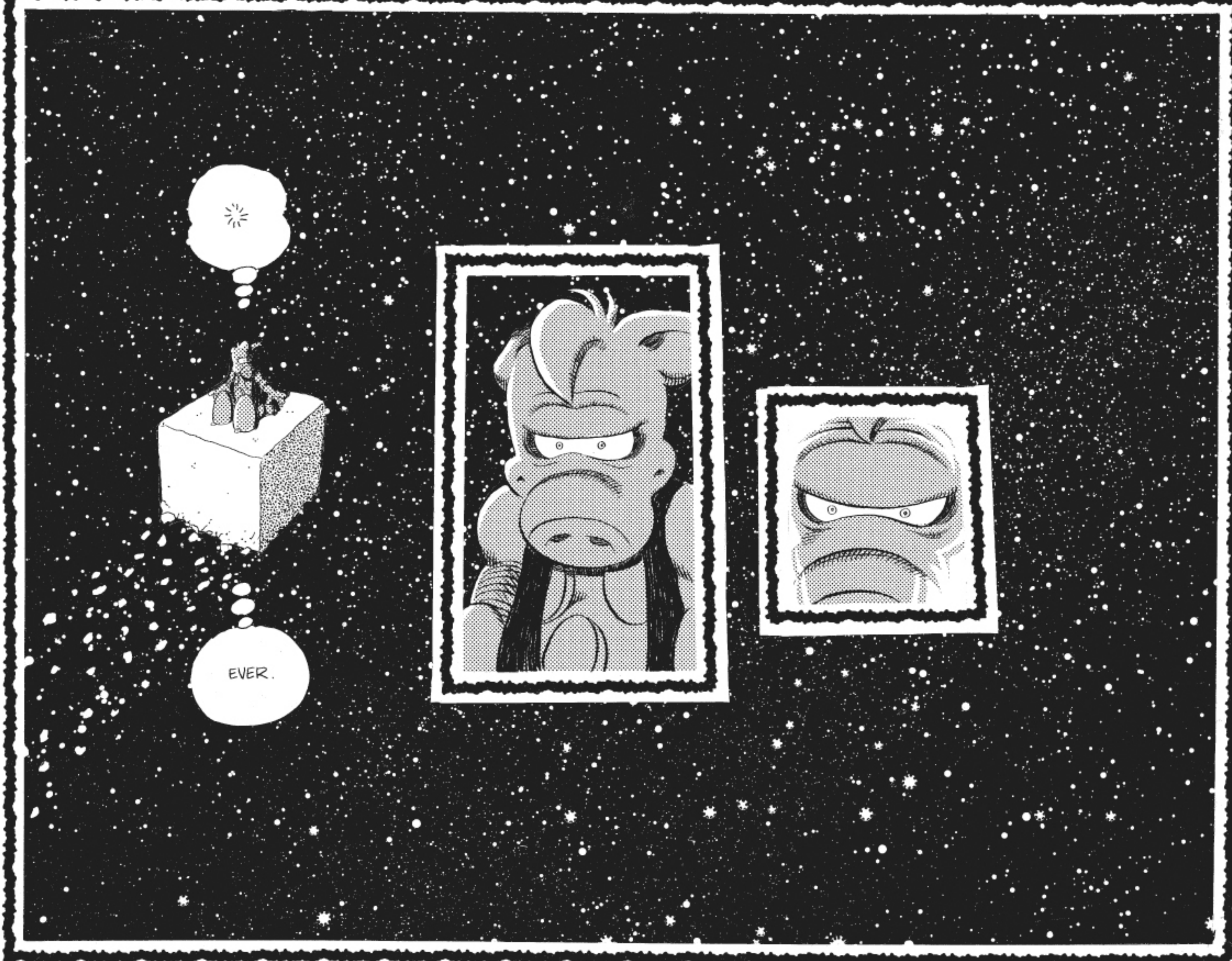
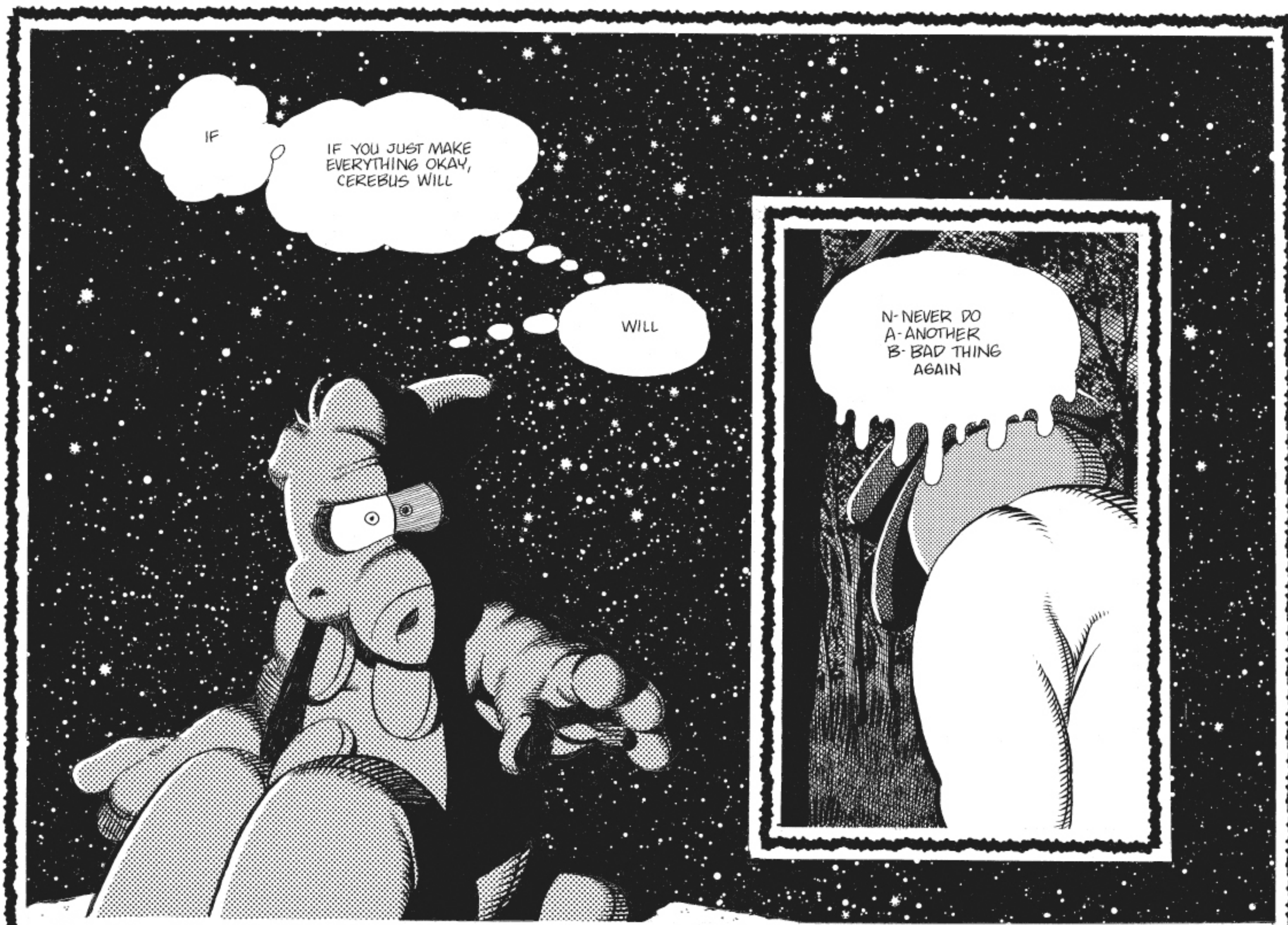
CEREBUS
IS B-BAD.

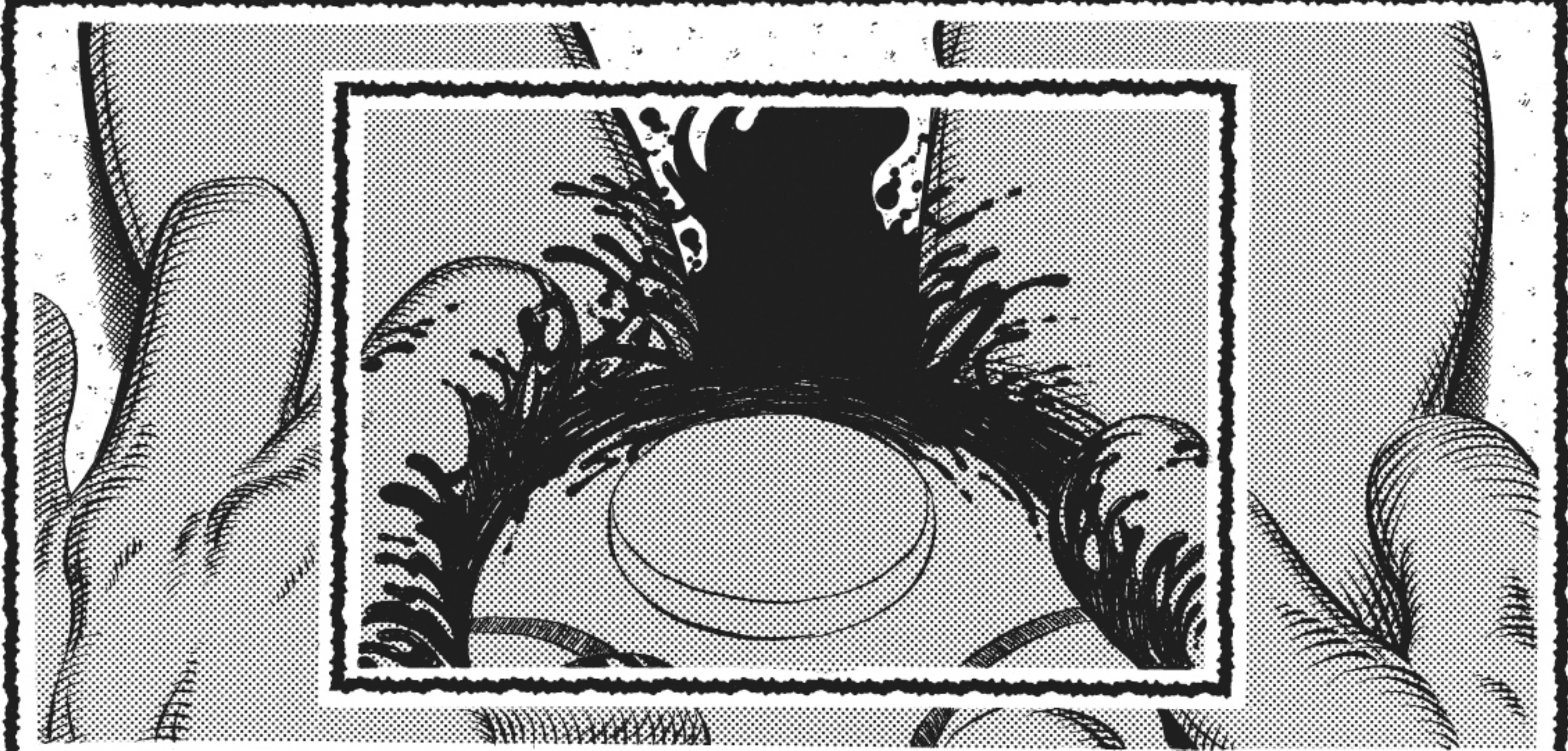
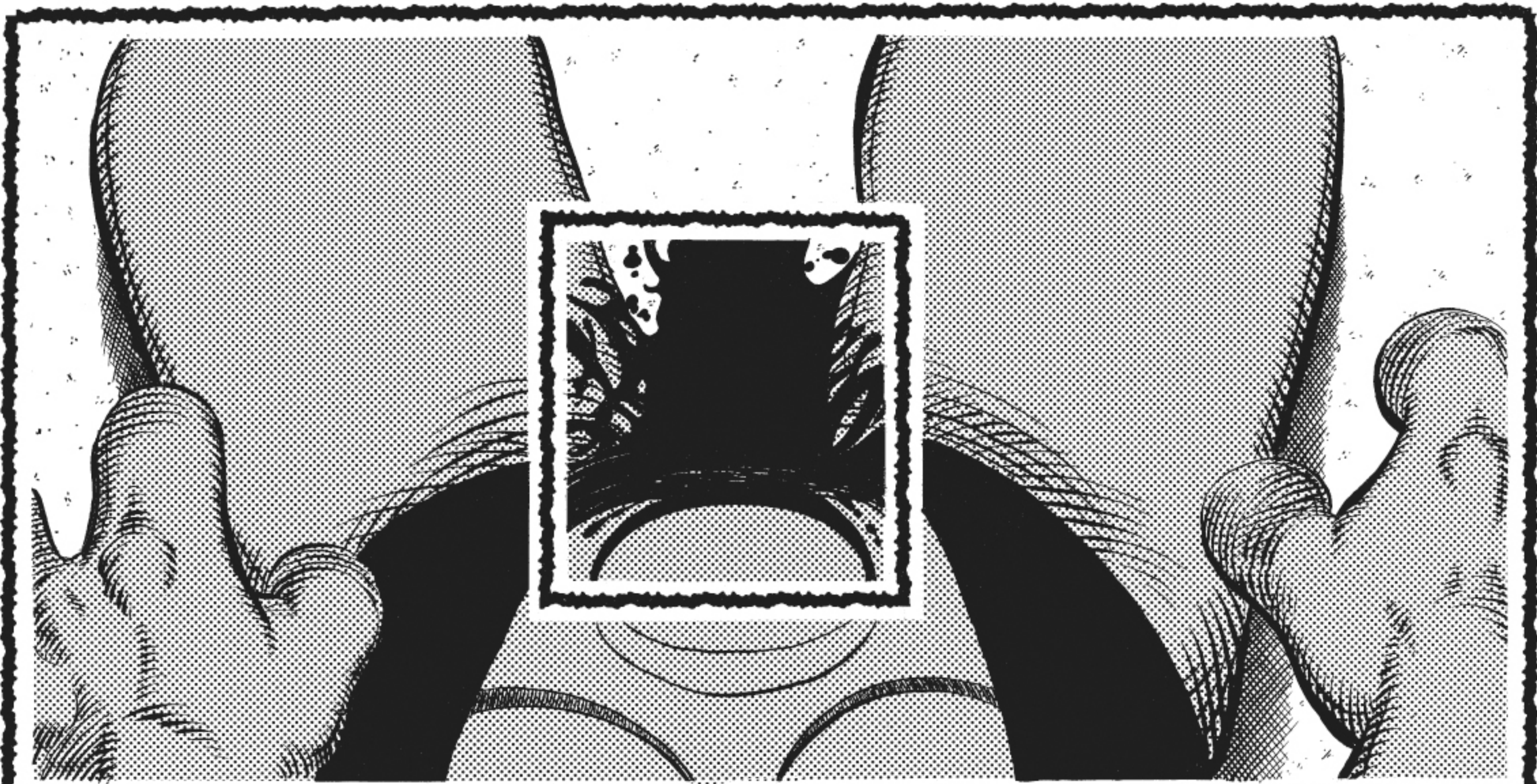


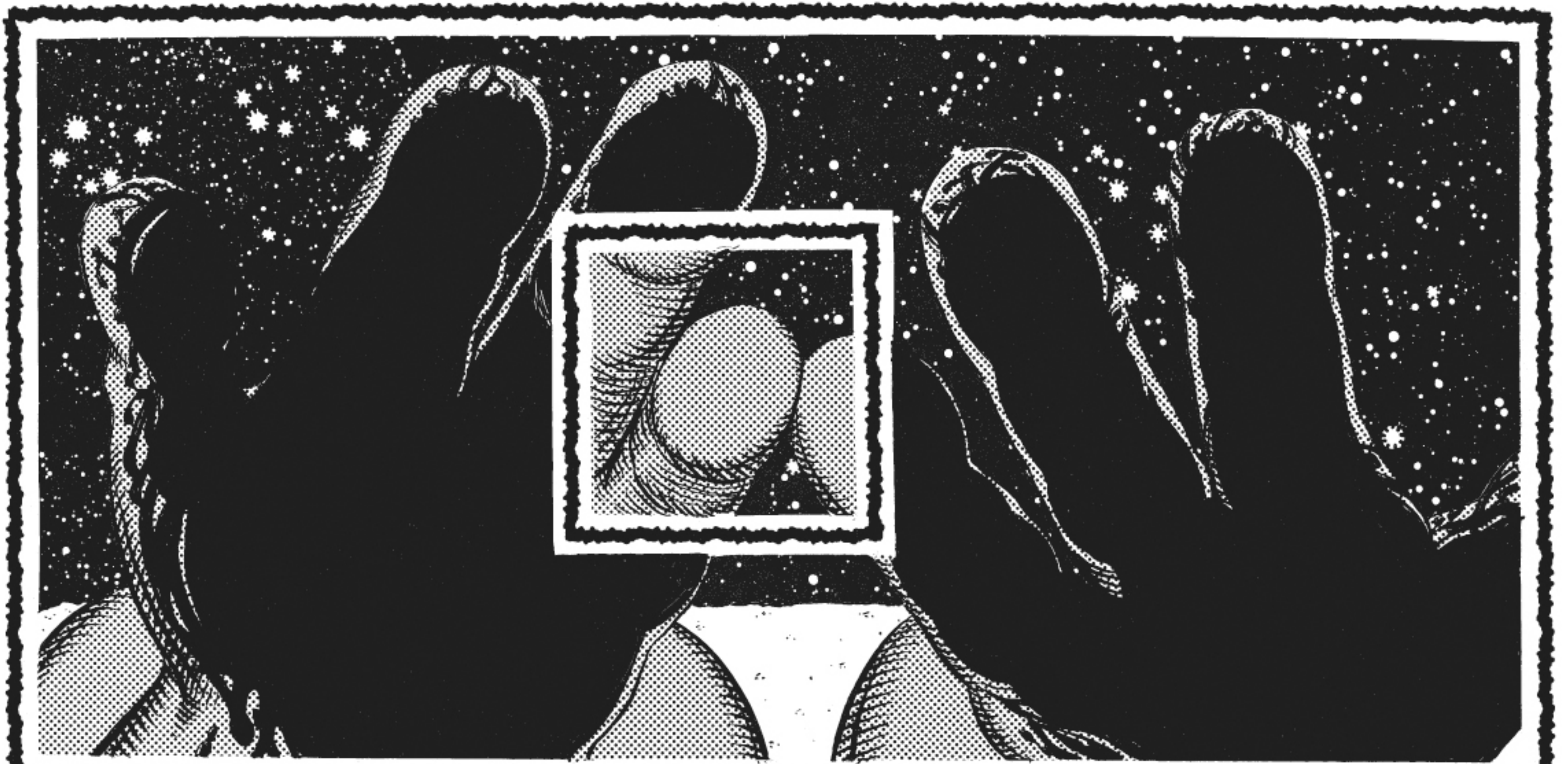
CEREBUS WILL
NEVER BE ABLE
TO EXPLAIN HOW
HE L-LOST THE
K-KITCHEN
KN-KNIFE

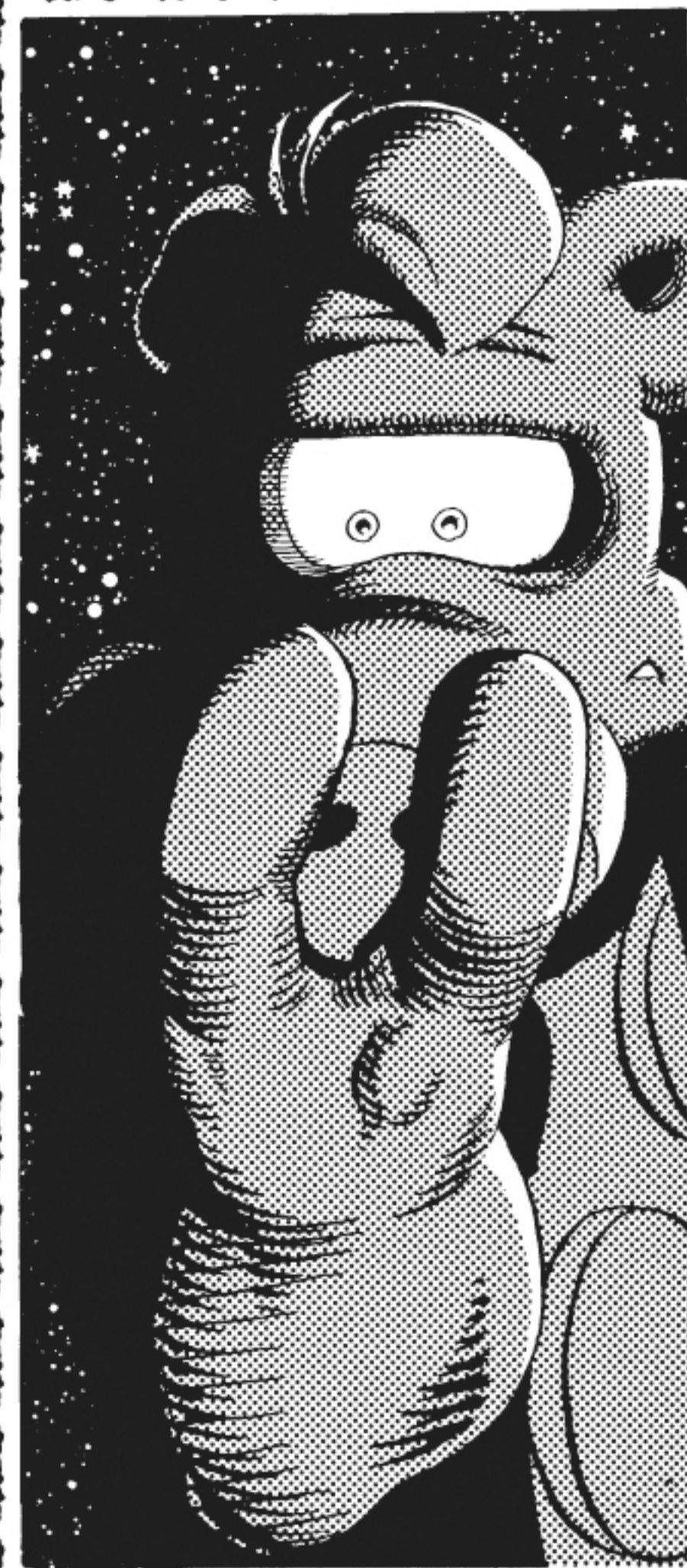
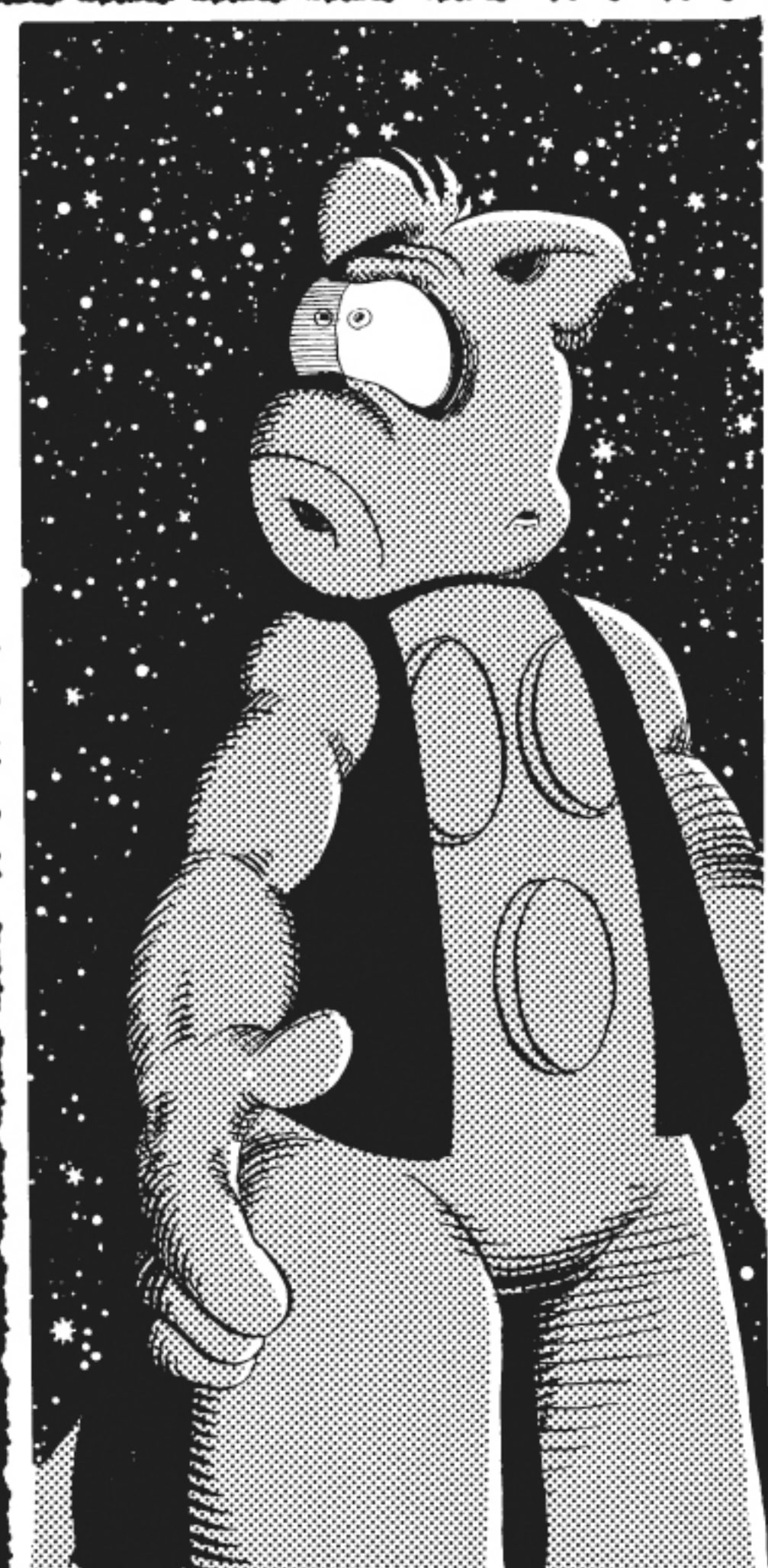
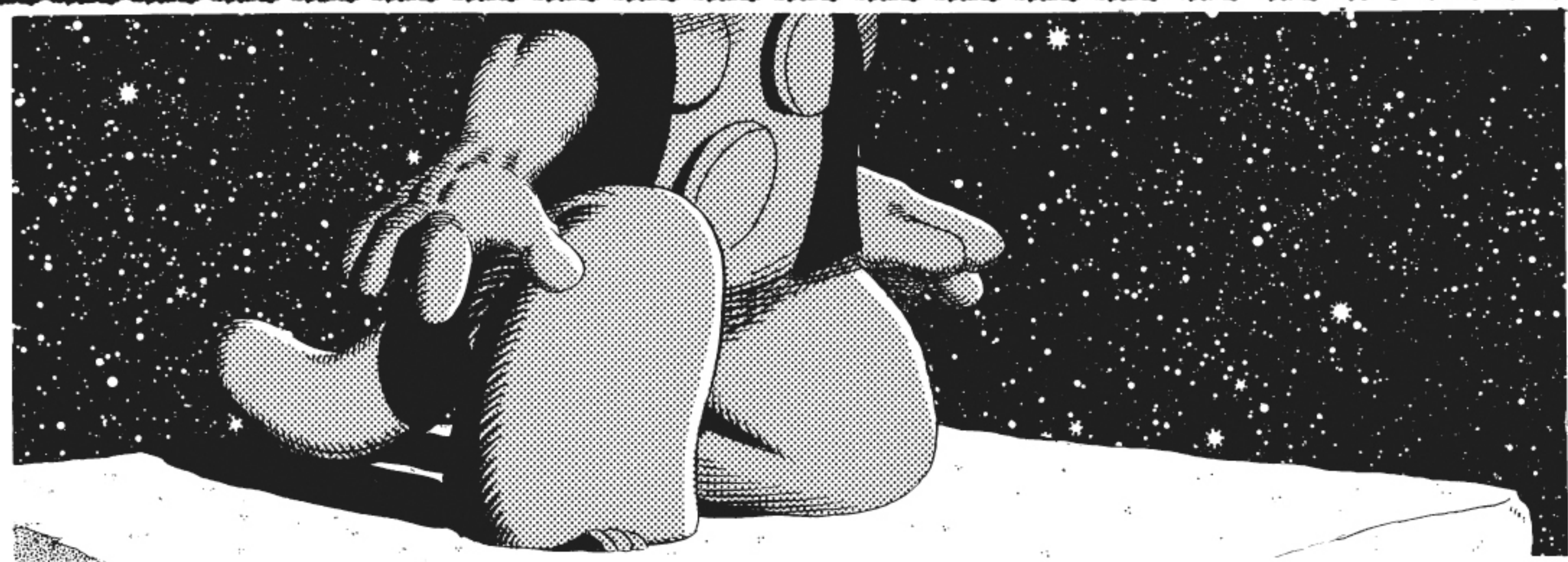
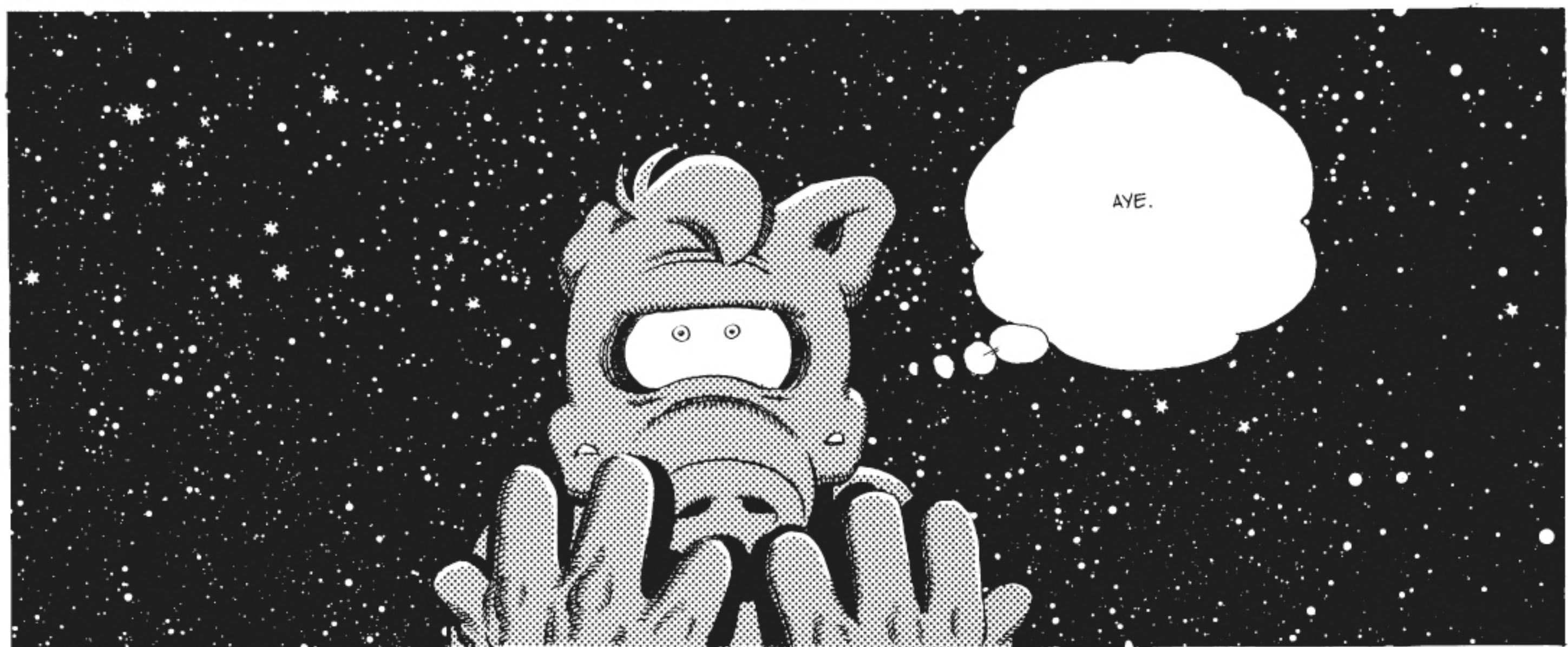


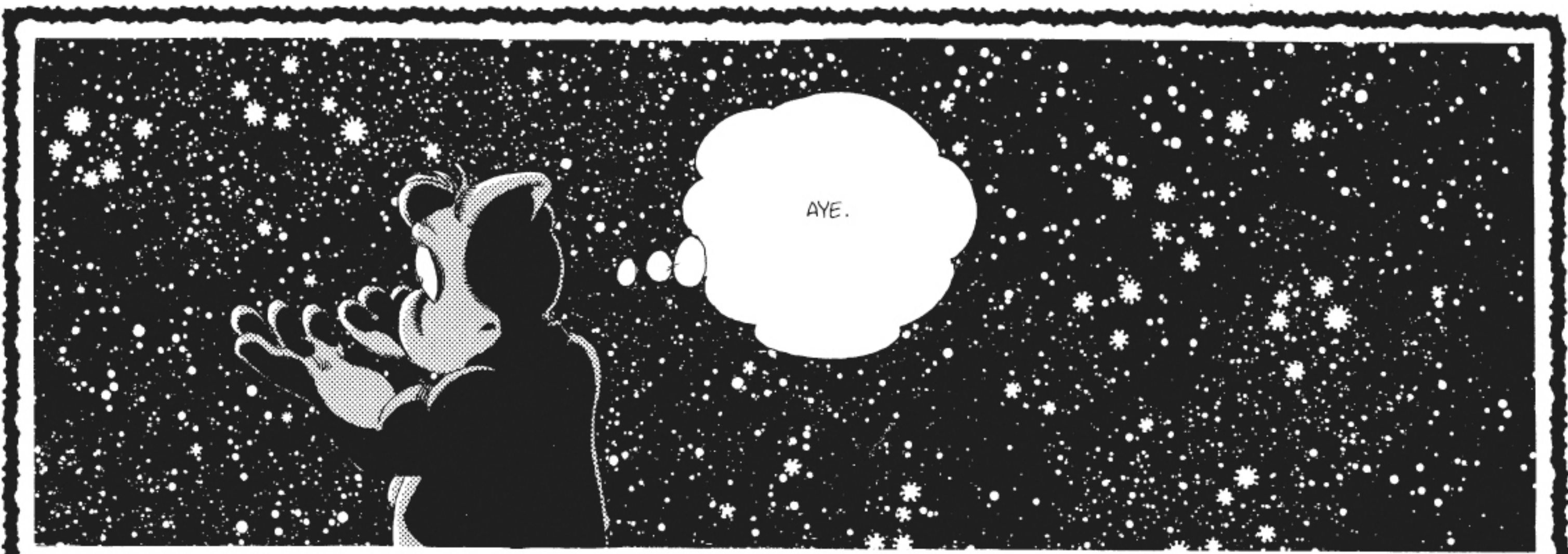


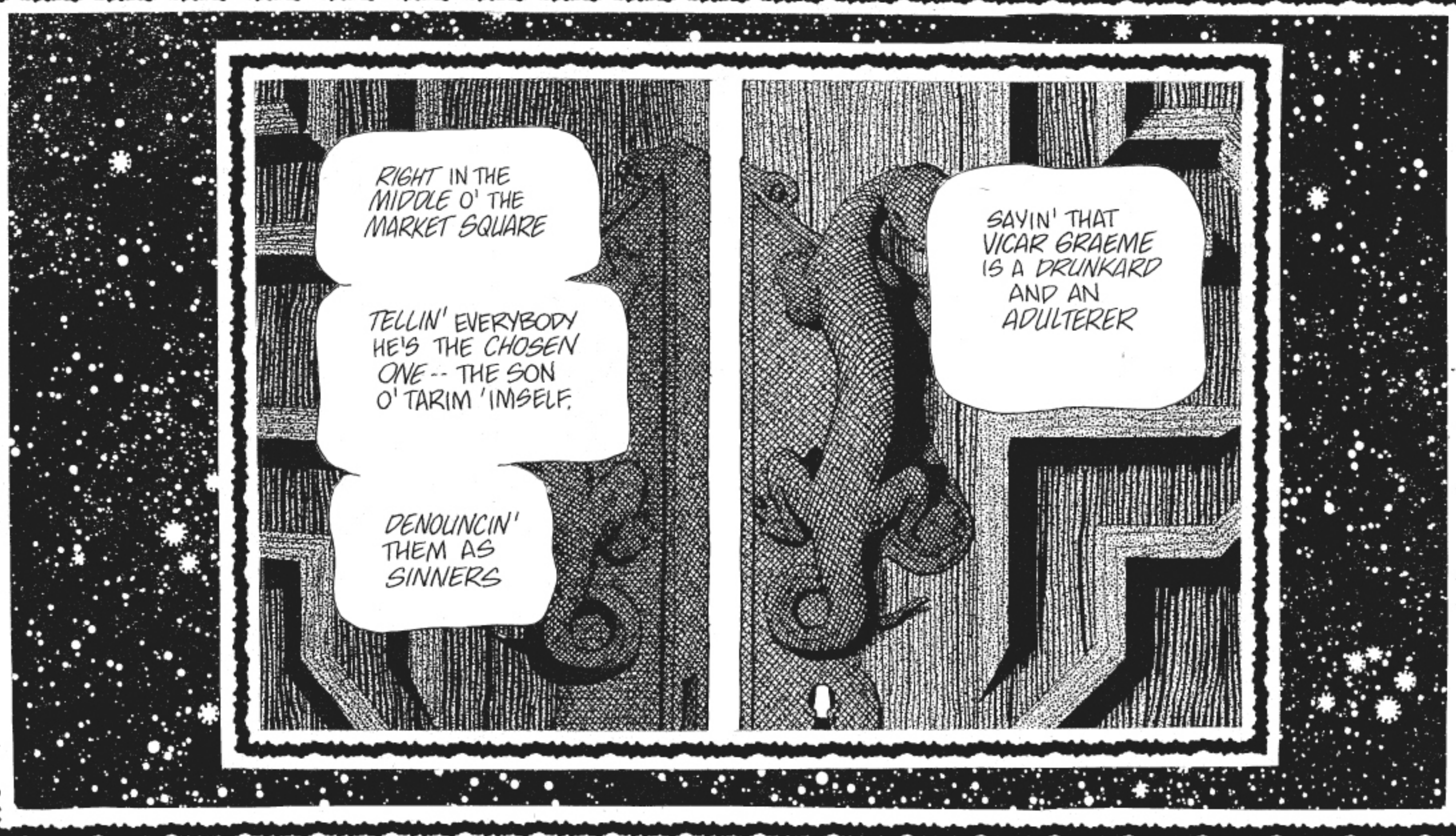
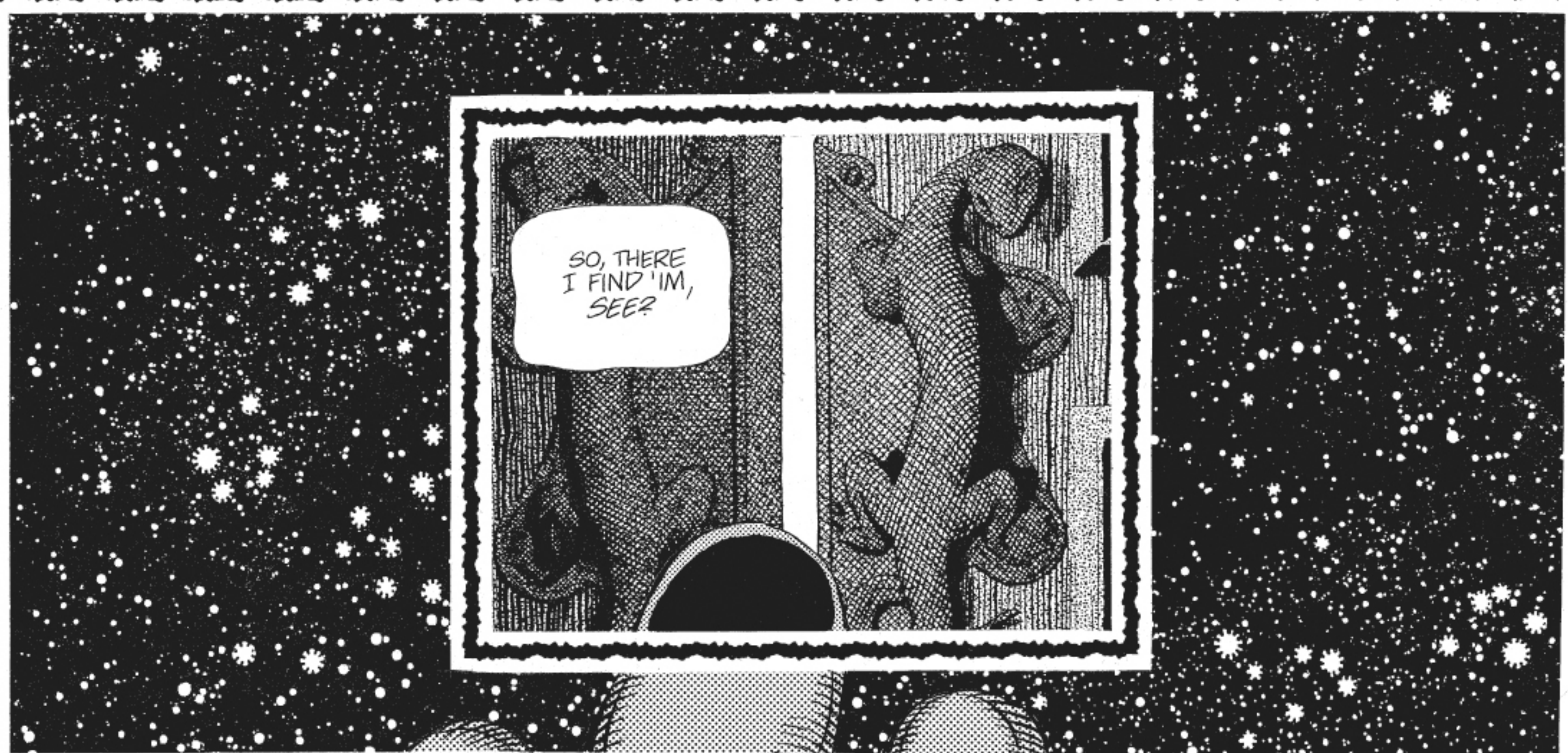
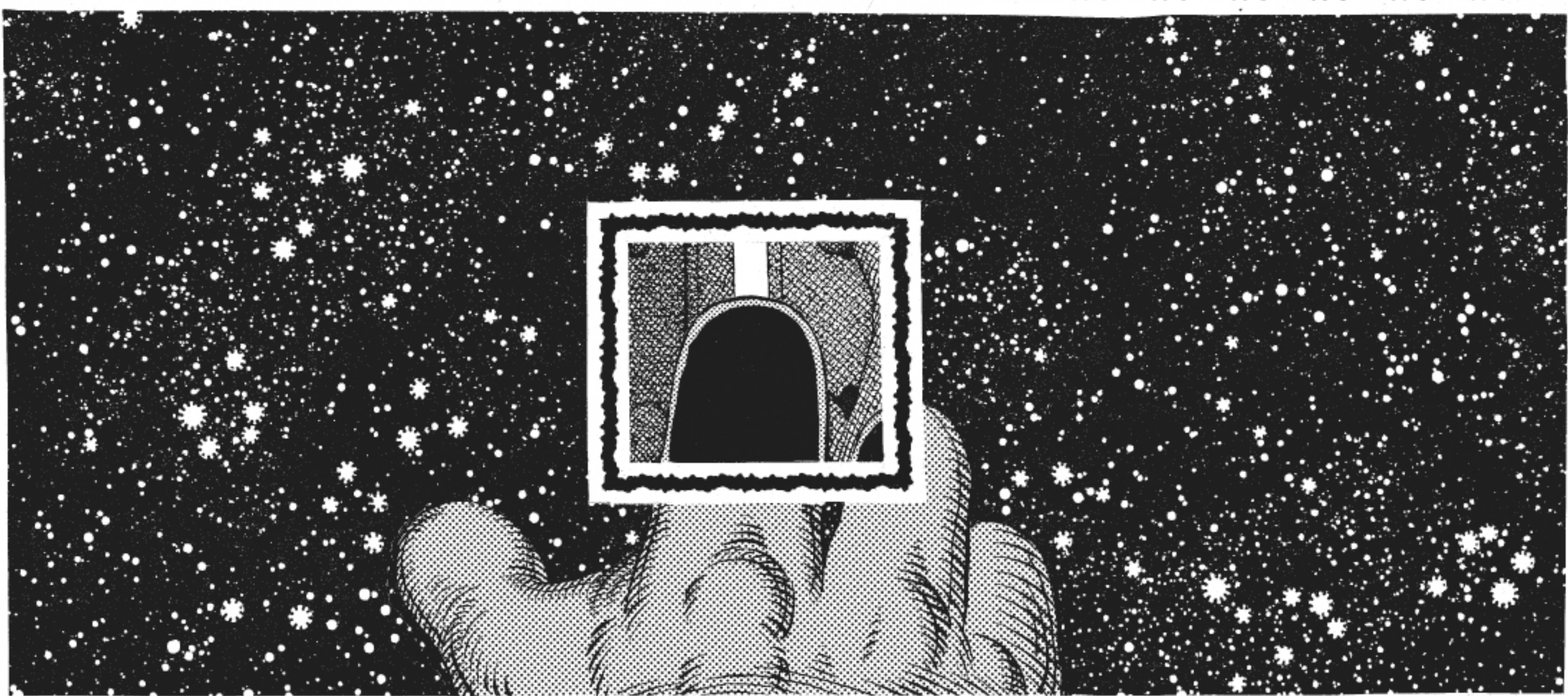














Vicar Graeme
is a drunkard
and an
adulterer.

WELL, YEAH--
O' COURSE, EVERYBODY
KNOWS THAT.

BUT Y'DON'T
GO SHOUTING IT
ALL OVER THE
MARKET SQUARE

≡ sigh ≡
Why have you
brought your
son to me,
carpenter?

WELL, YOU'RE
A MAGICIAN--
I THOUGHT--
YOU KNOW...

YOU'D HAVE
A POTION OR A...
SPELL OR SOMETHING.

SETTLE 'IM
DOWN A BIT.
SO 'E'S LIKE
THE OTHER
BOYS.

I
see.

And what if
your son is
correct?

What if he
is the chosen
one?

AYE?

WOT?

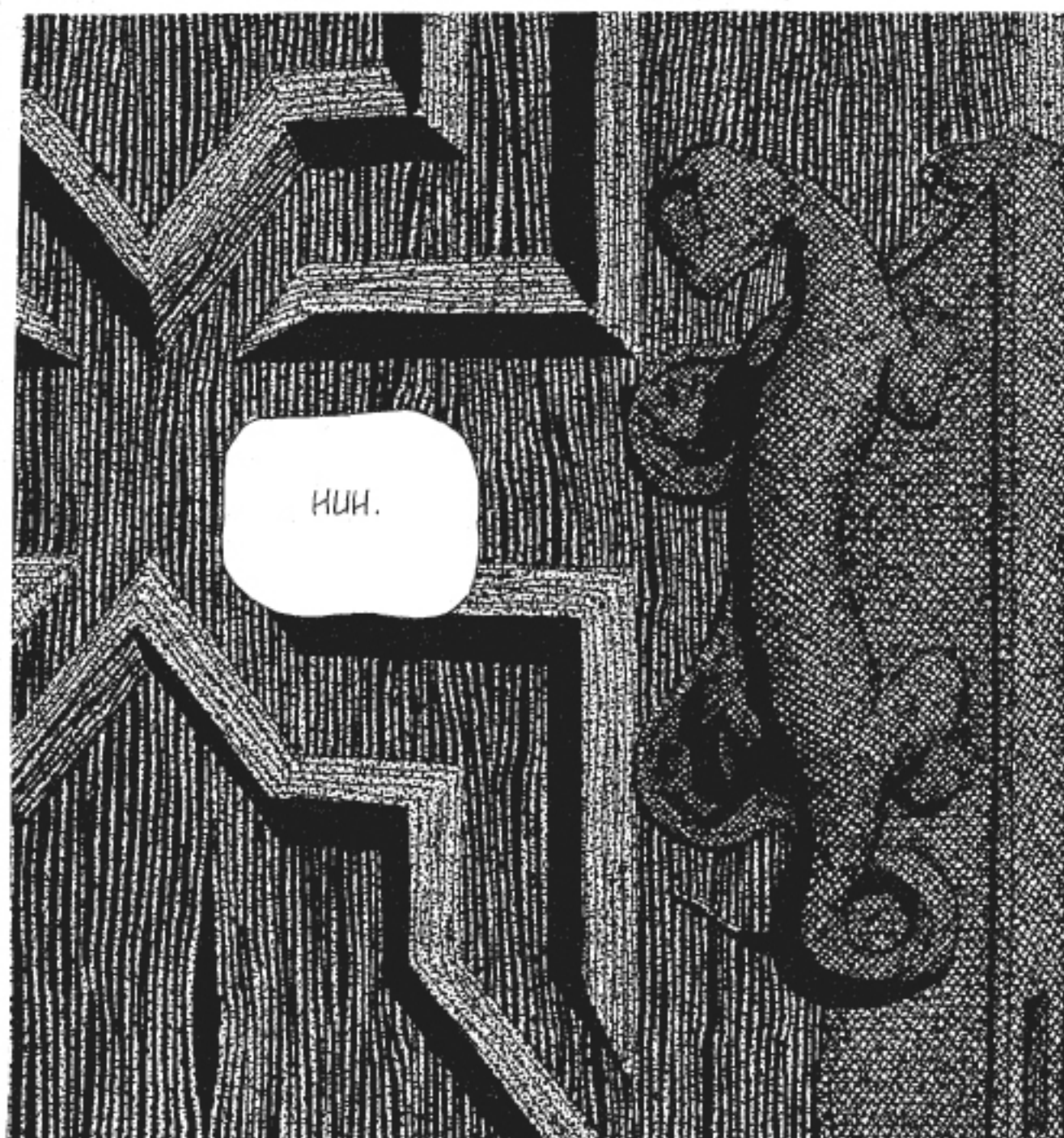
MY CEREBUS? THE
... THE ... WELL!

I MEAN WHAT
ARE THE ODDS
O' THAT?

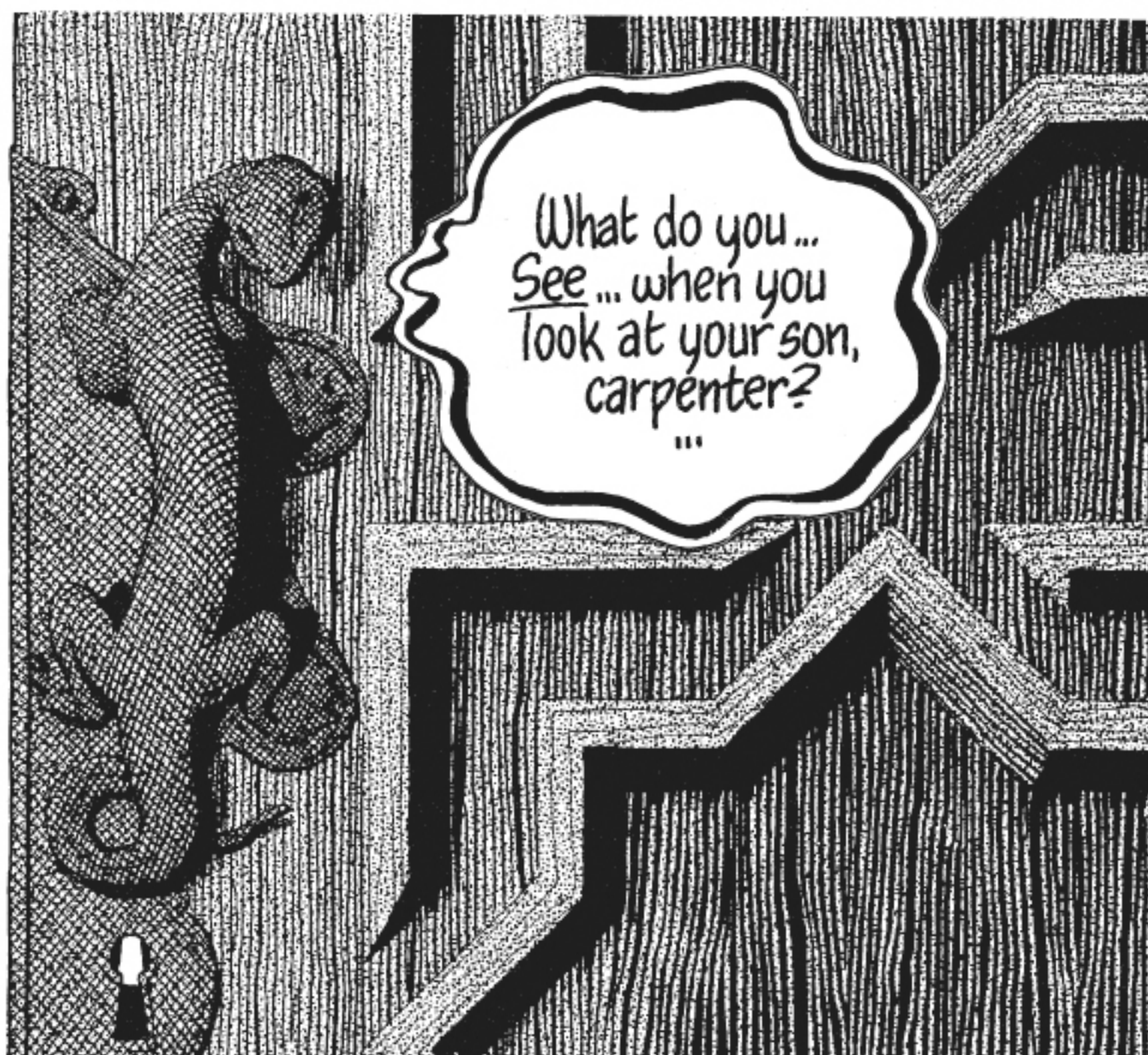
The Will of Tarim
is not a dog race,
carpenter.

To tamper with it
To Miscalculate
on the basis of...
Likelihood...

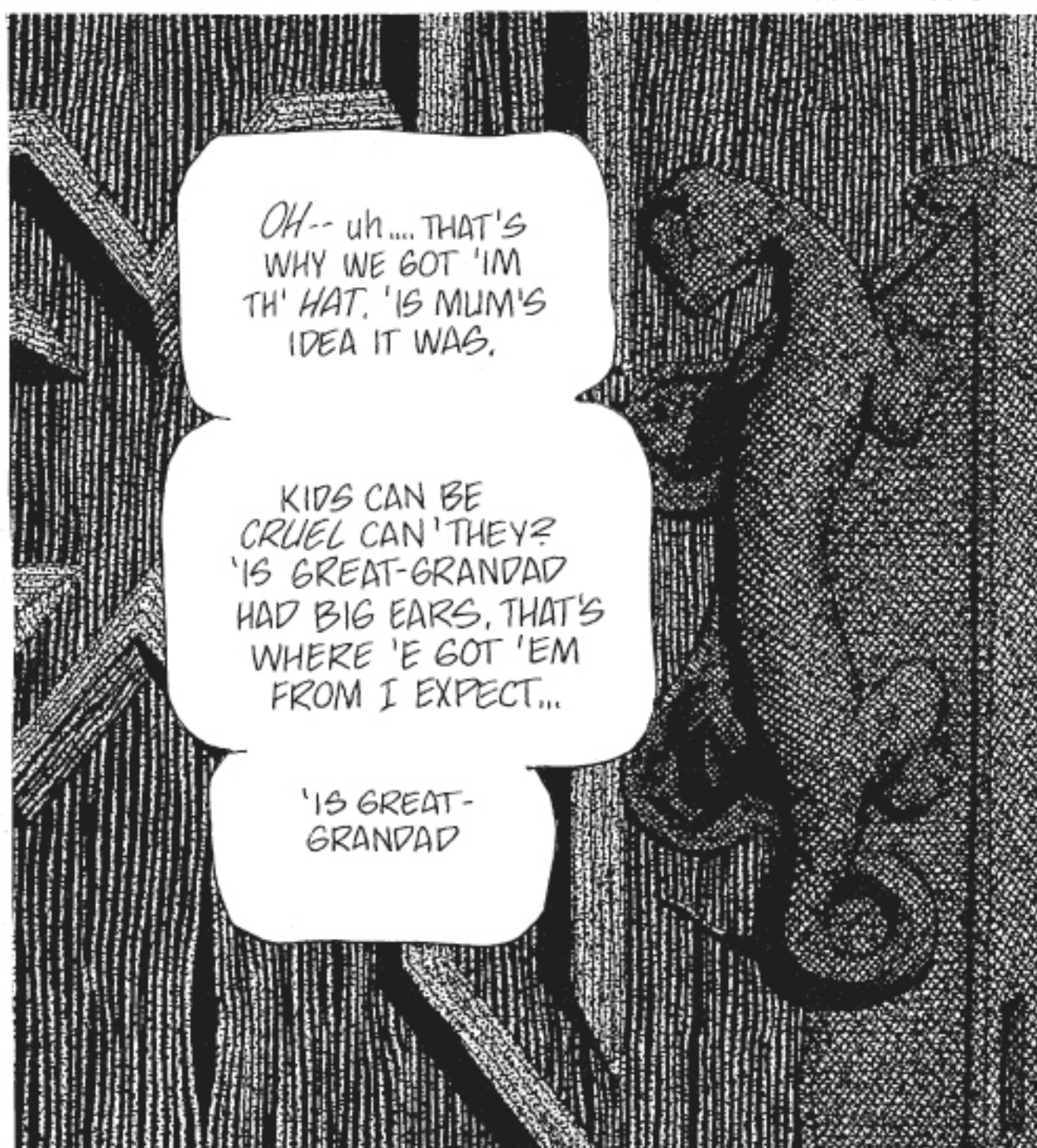
...
would be to
invite Incalculable
Consequence.



HUH.



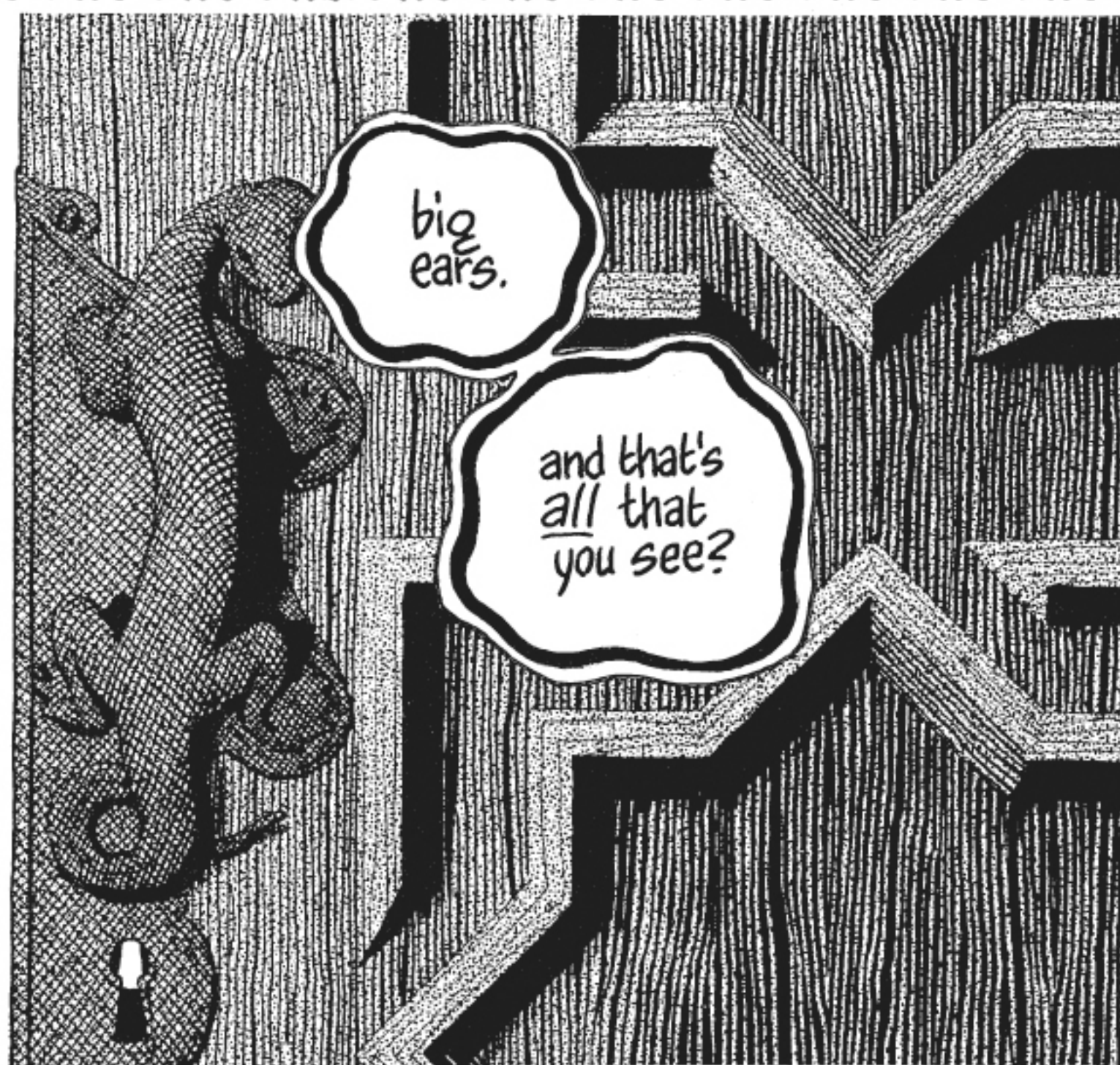
What do you...
See... when you
look at your son,
carpenter?
...



OH-- uh... THAT'S
WHY WE GOT 'IM
TH' HAT. 'IS MUM'S
IDEA IT WAS.

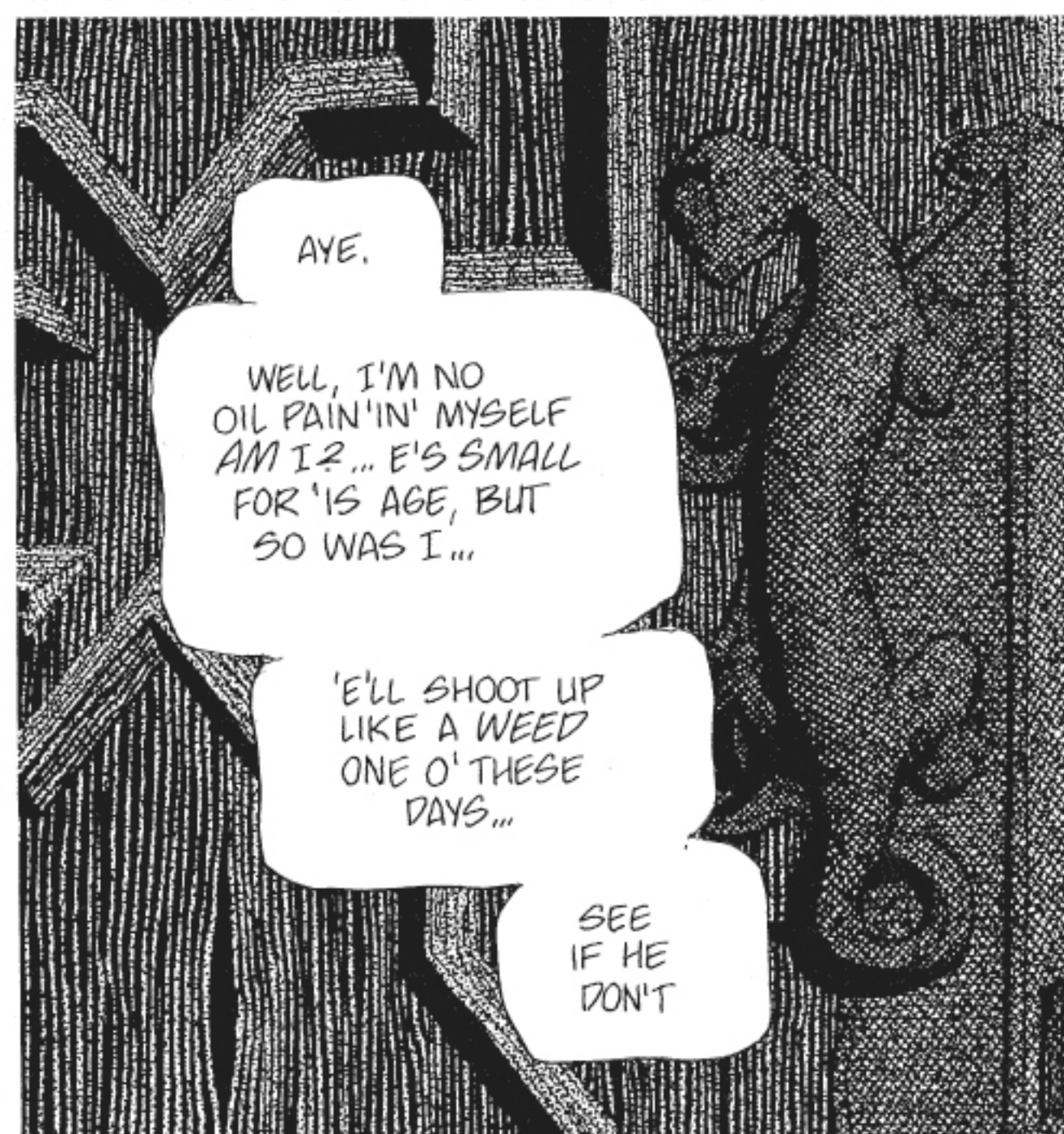
KIDS CAN BE
CRUEL CAN 'THEY?
'IS GREAT-GRANDAD
HAD BIG EARS, THAT'S
WHERE 'E GOT 'EM
FROM I EXPECT...

'IS GREAT-
GRANDAD



big
ears.

and that's
all that
you see?

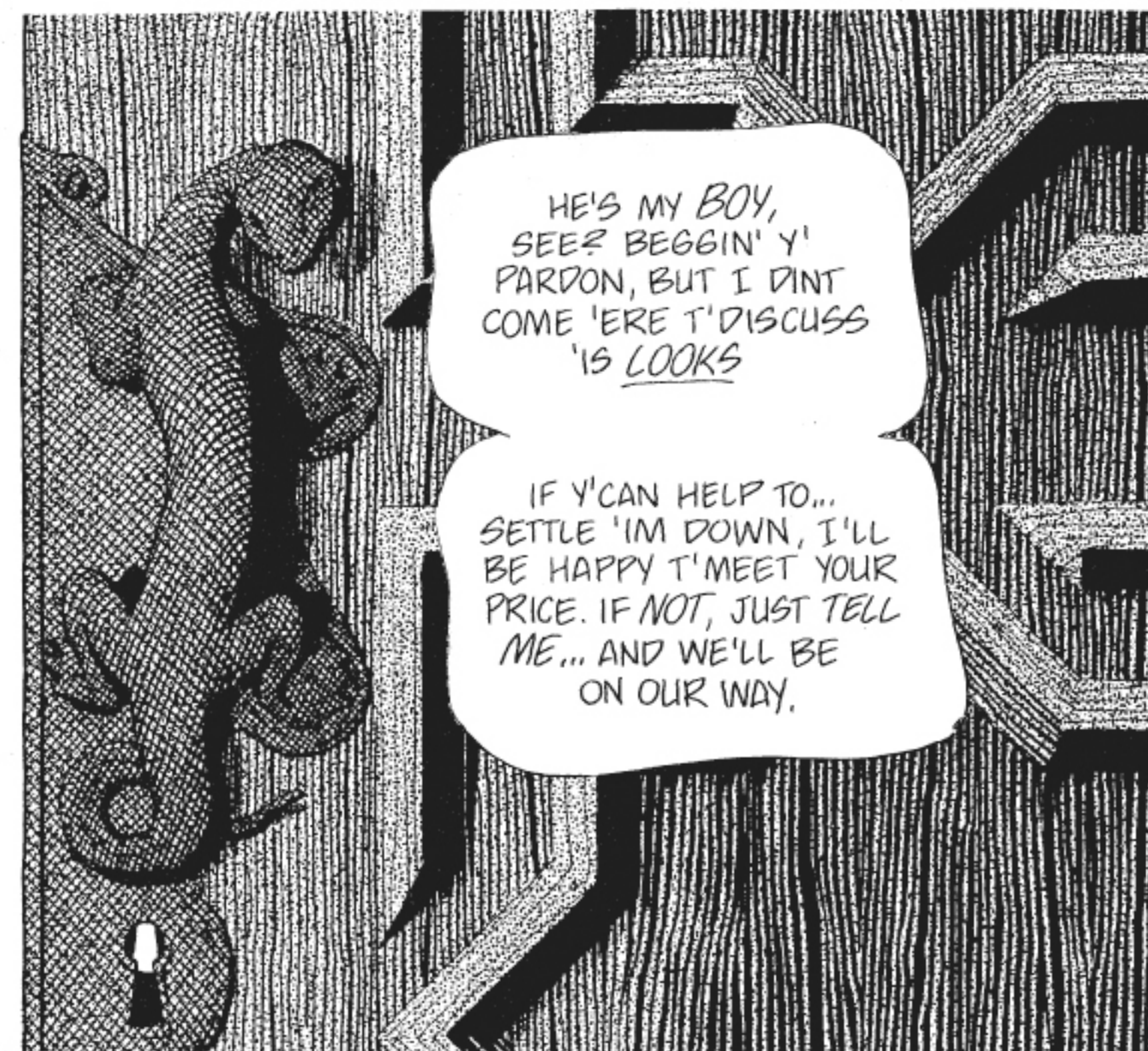


AYE.

WELL, I'M NO
OIL PAIN'IN' MYSELF
AM I?... E'S SMALL
FOR 'IS AGE, BUT
SO WAS I...

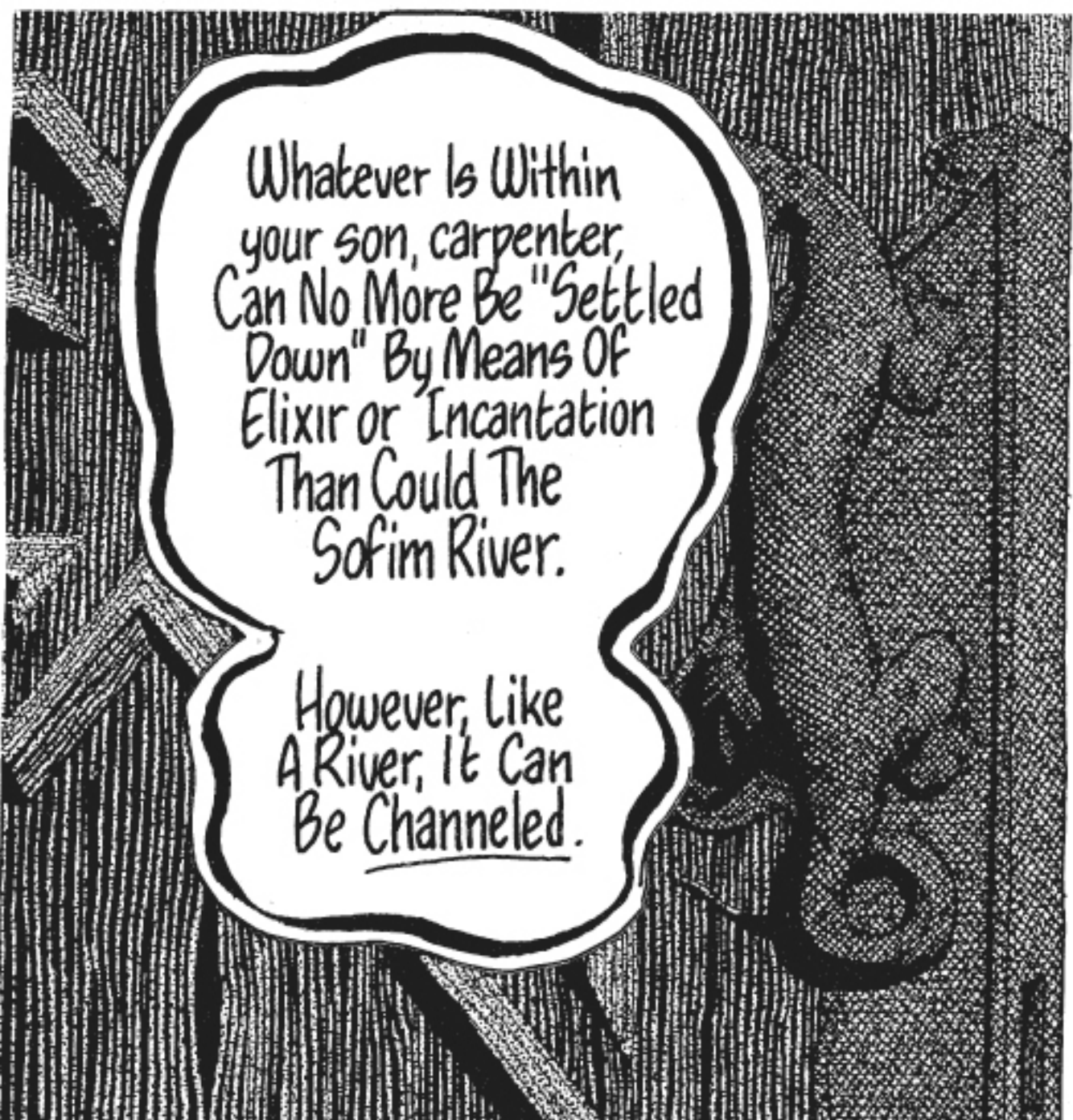
'E'LL SHOOT UP
LIKE A WEED
ONE O' THESE
DAYS...

SEE
IF HE
DON'T



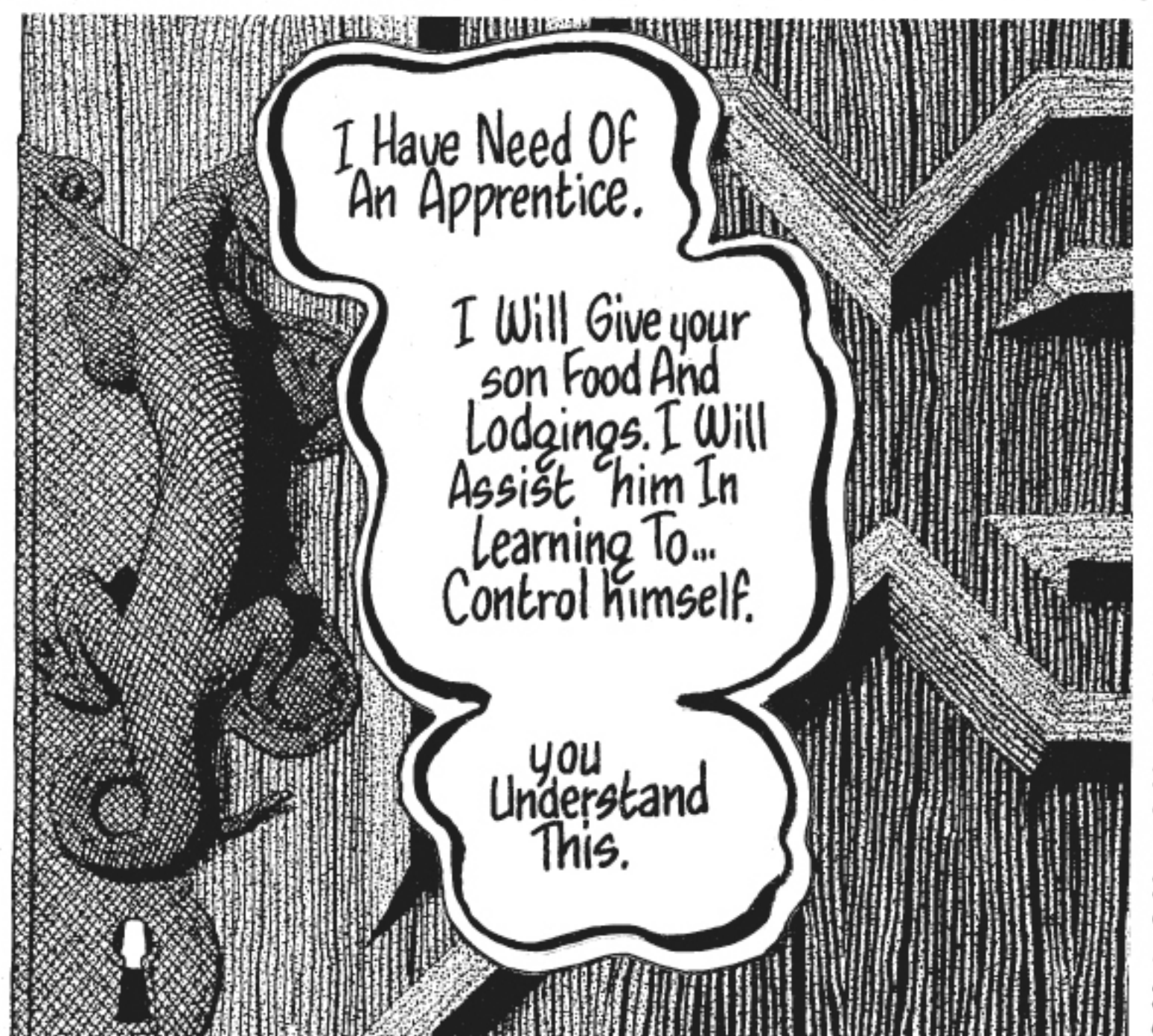
HE'S MY BOY,
SEE? BEGGIN' Y'
PARDON, BUT I DINT
COME 'ERE T'DISCUSS
'IS LOOKS

IF Y'CAN HELP TO...
SETTLE 'IM DOWN, I'LL
BE HAPPY T'MEET YOUR
PRICE. IF NOT, JUST TELL
ME... AND WE'LL BE
ON OUR WAY.



Whatever Is Within
your son, carpenter,
Can No More Be "Settled
Down" By Means Of
Elixir or Incantation
Than Could The
Sofim River.

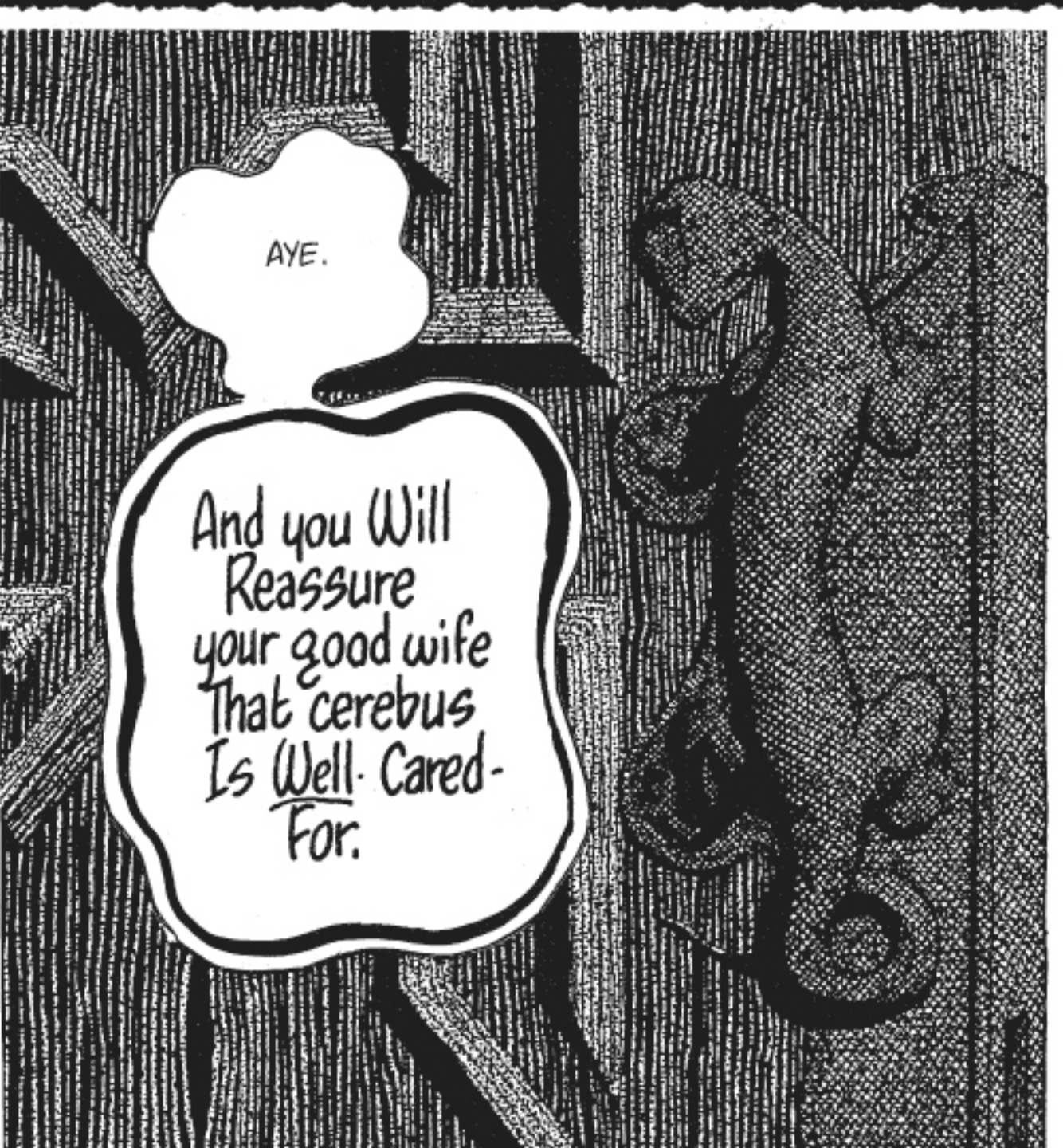
However, Like
A River, It Can
Be Channeled.



I Have Need Of
An Apprentice.

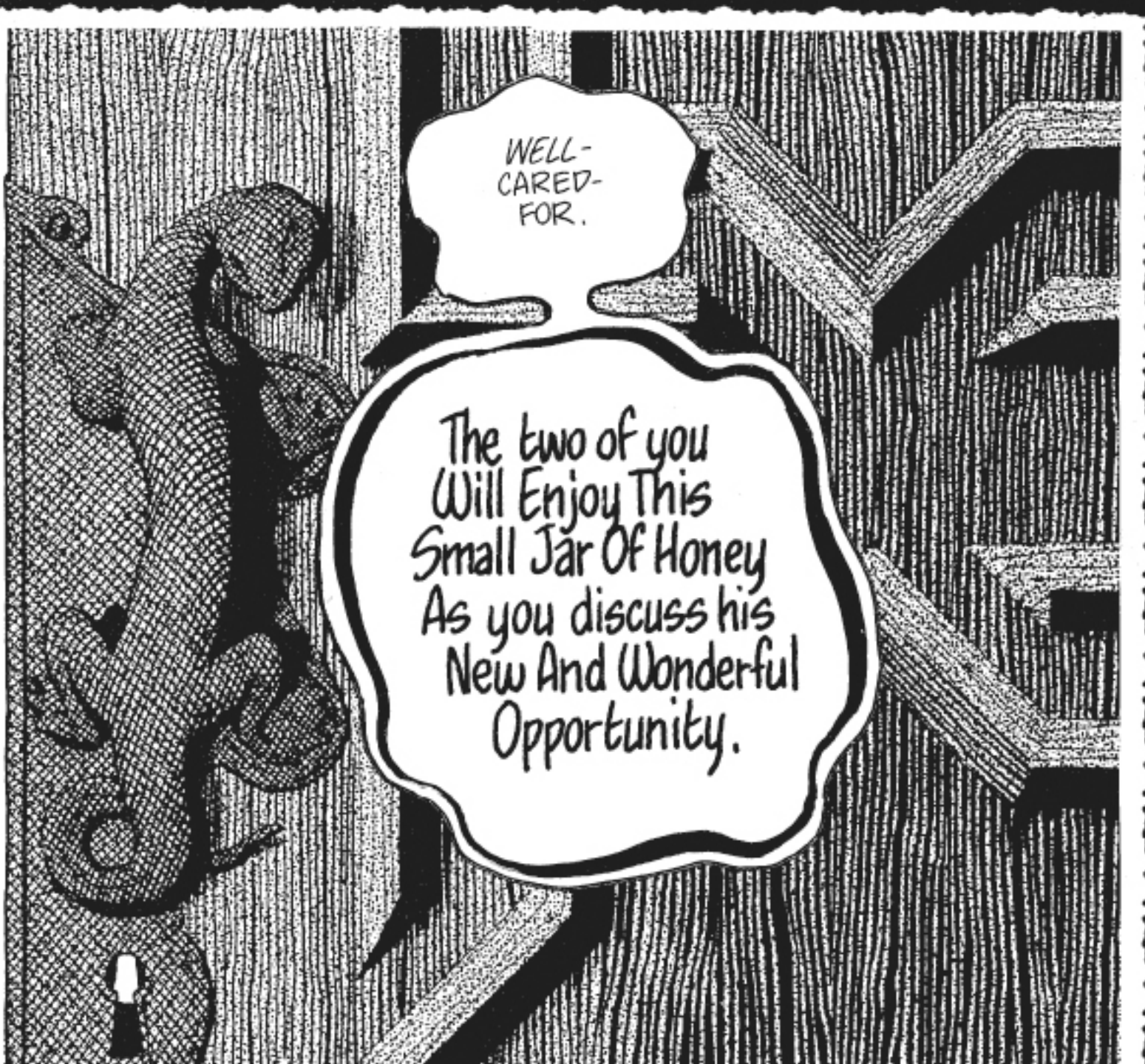
I Will Give your
son Food And
Lodgings. I Will
Assist him In
Learning To...
Control himself.

you
Understand
This.



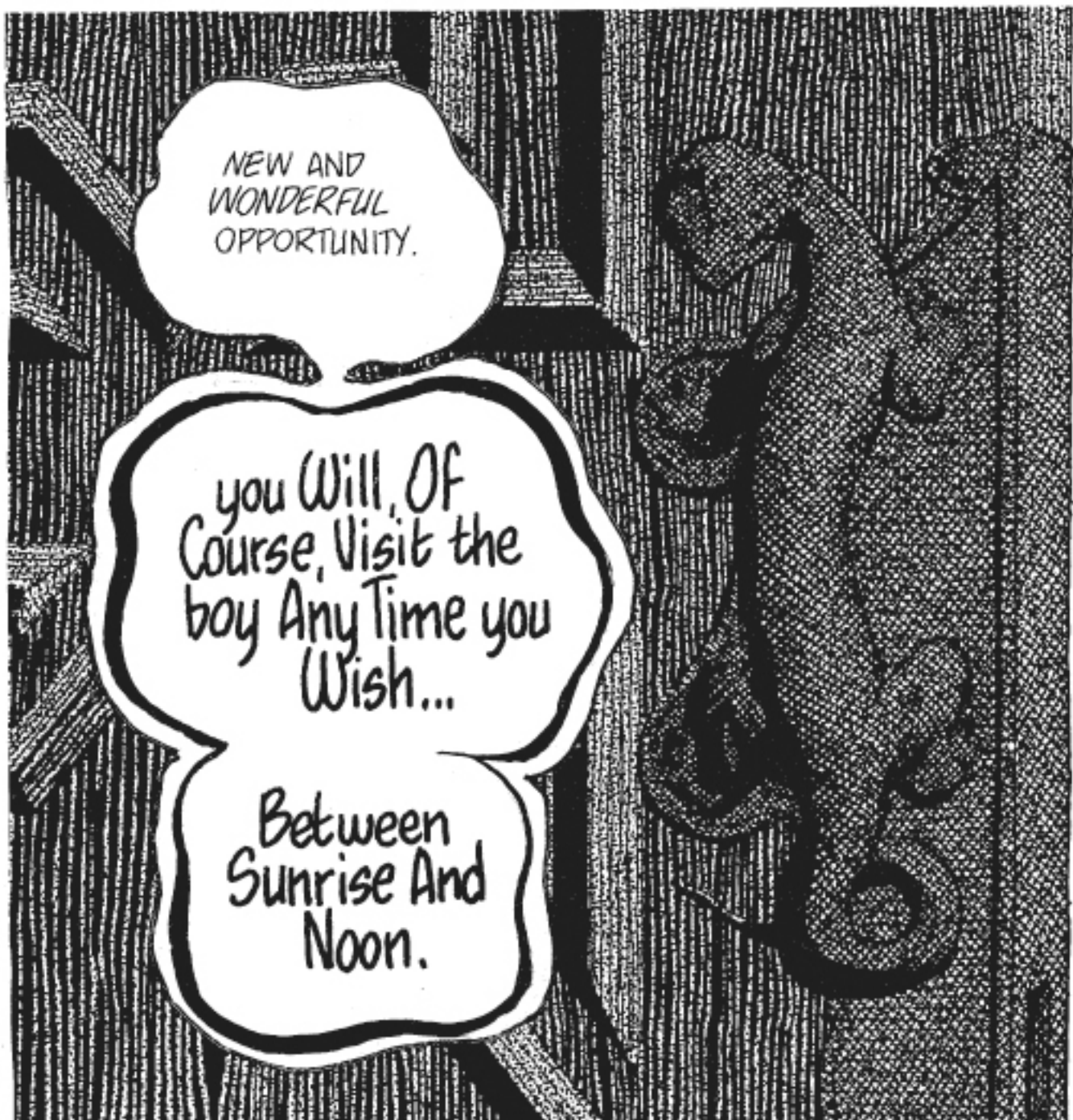
AYE.

And you Will
Reassure
your good wife
That cerebus
Is Well-Cared-
For.



WELL-
CARED-
FOR.

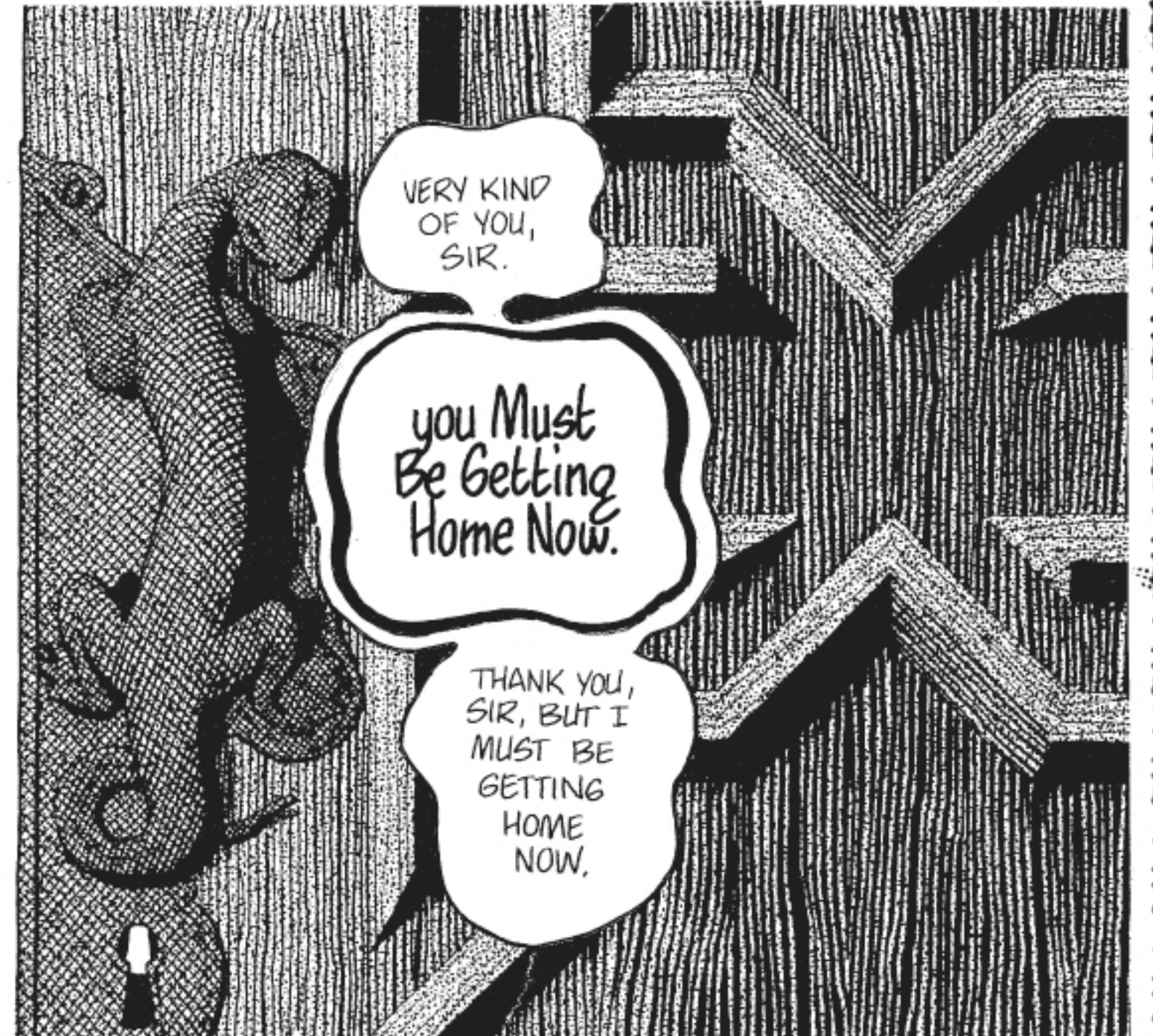
The two of you
Will Enjoy This
Small Jar Of Honey
As you discuss his
New And Wonderful
Opportunity.



NEW AND
WONDERFUL
OPPORTUNITY.

you Will, Of
Course, Visit the
boy Any Time you
Wish...

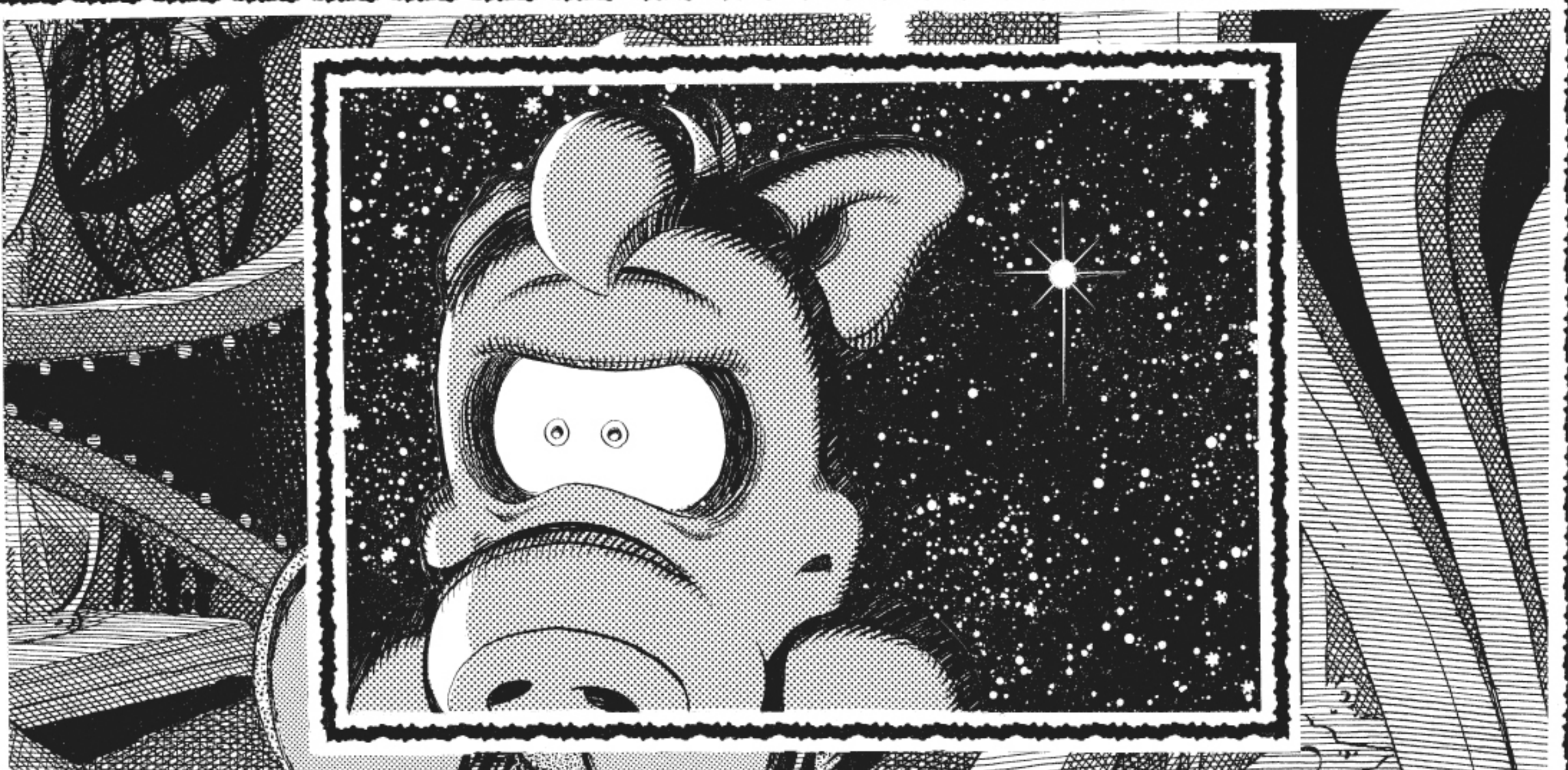
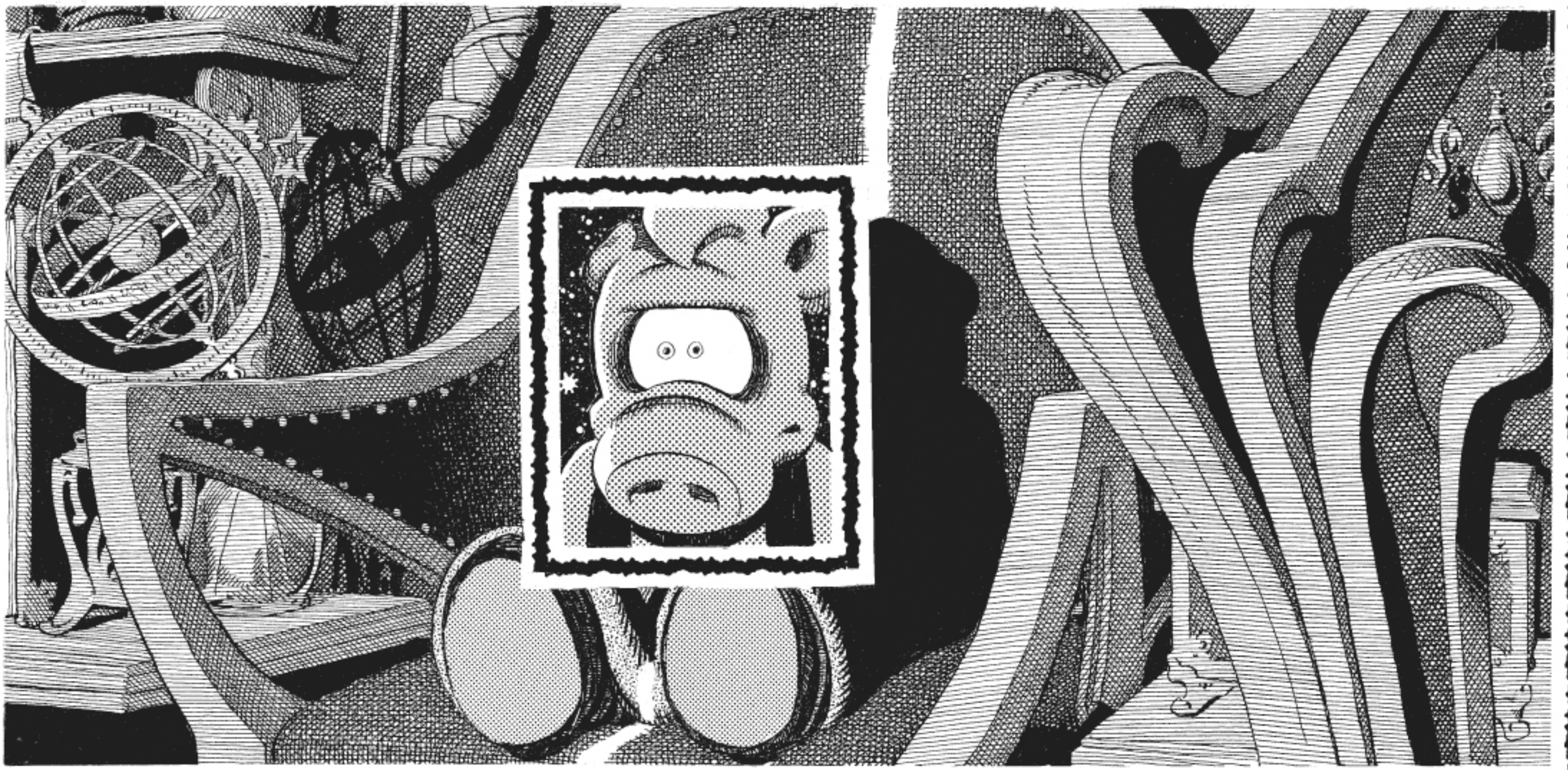
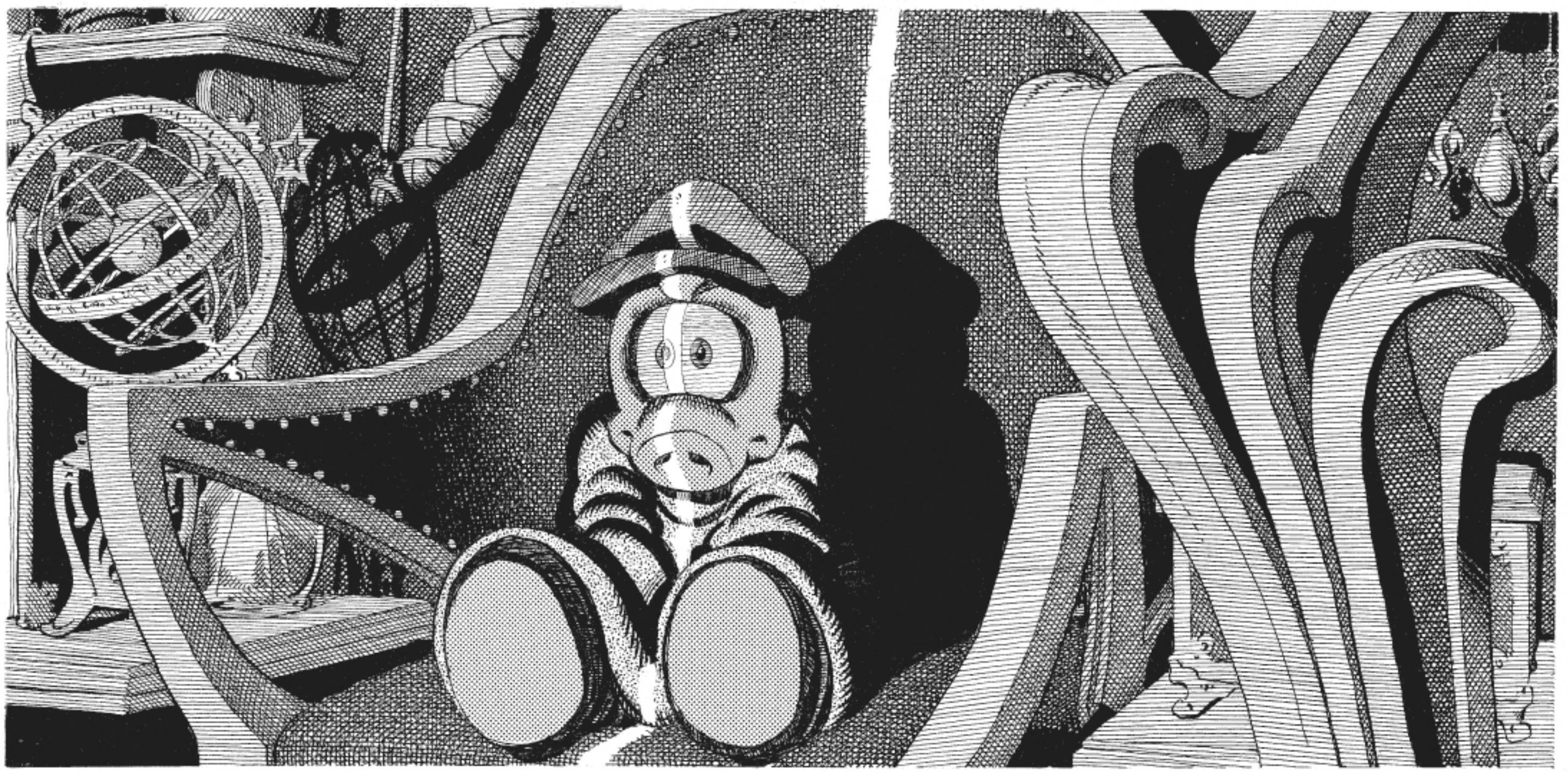
Between
Sunrise And
Noon.

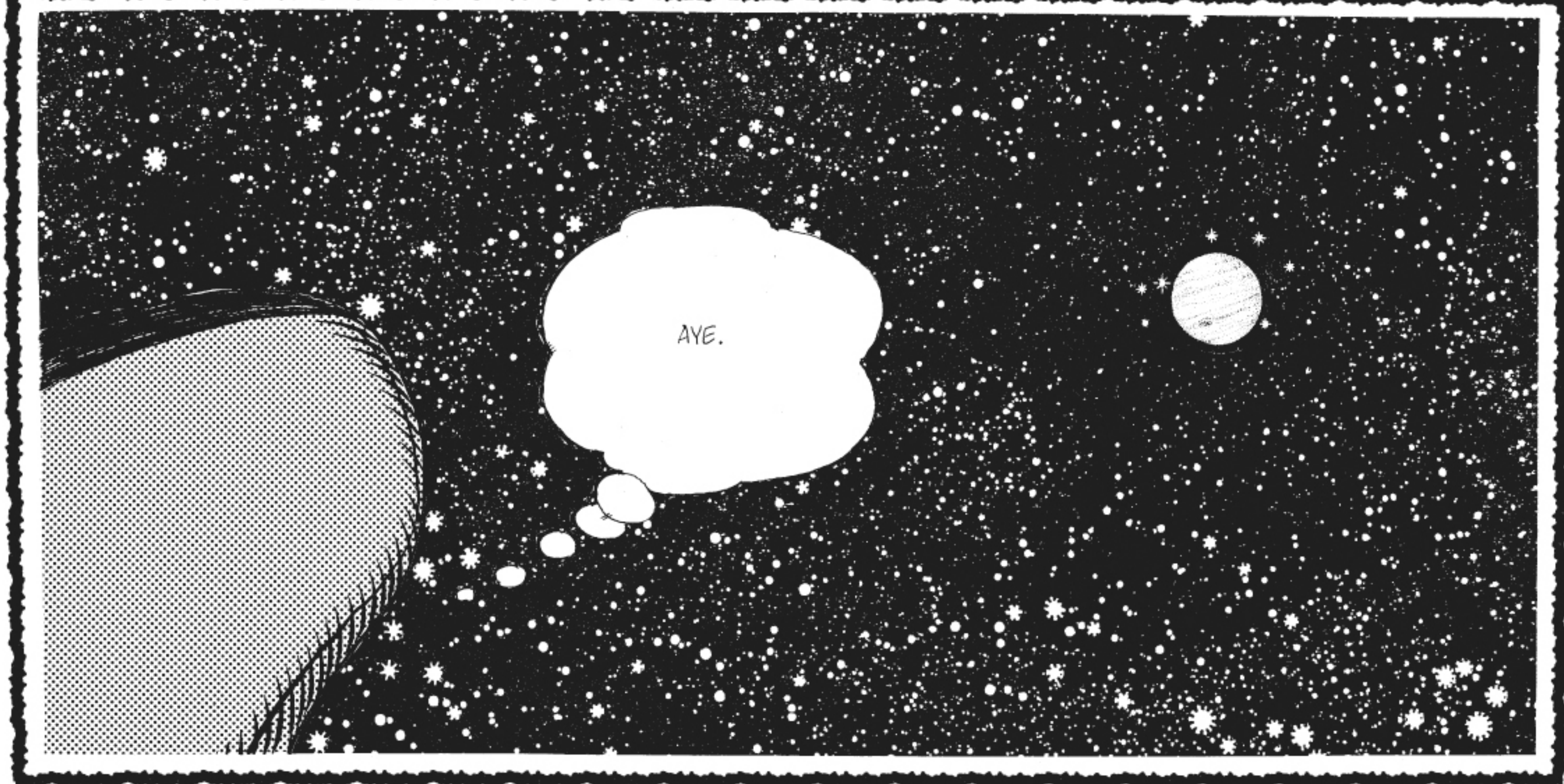
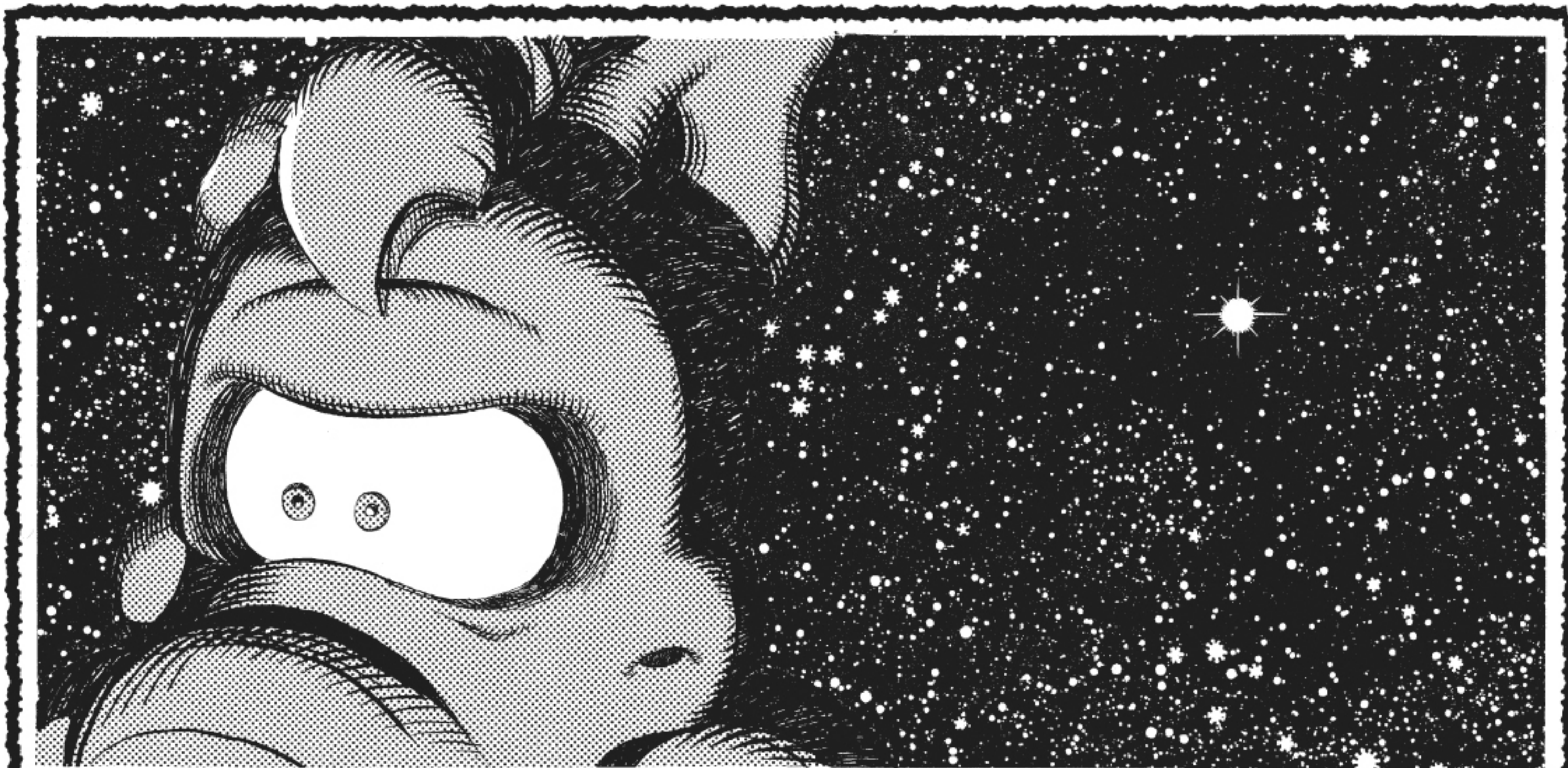


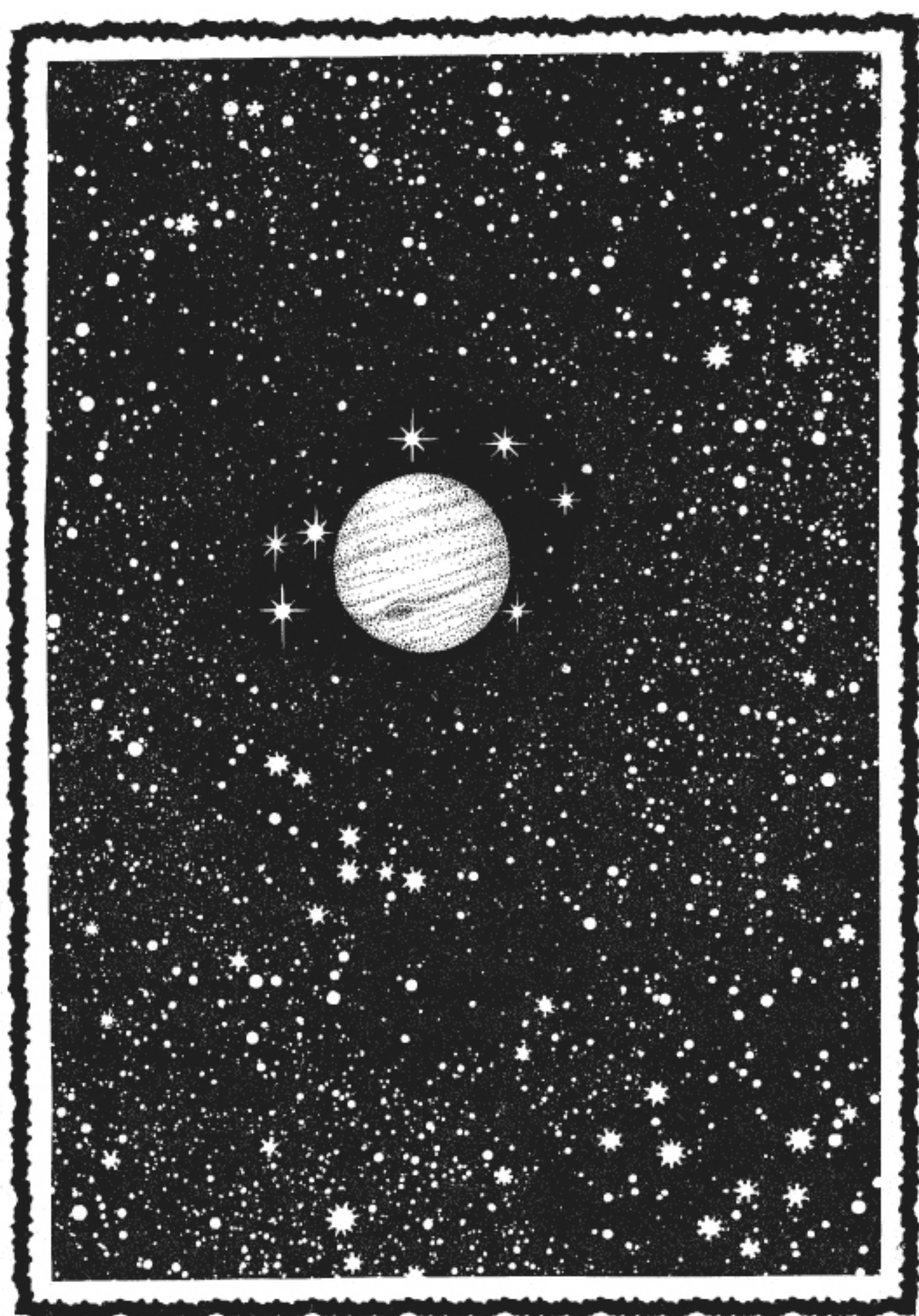
VERY KIND
OF YOU,
SIR.

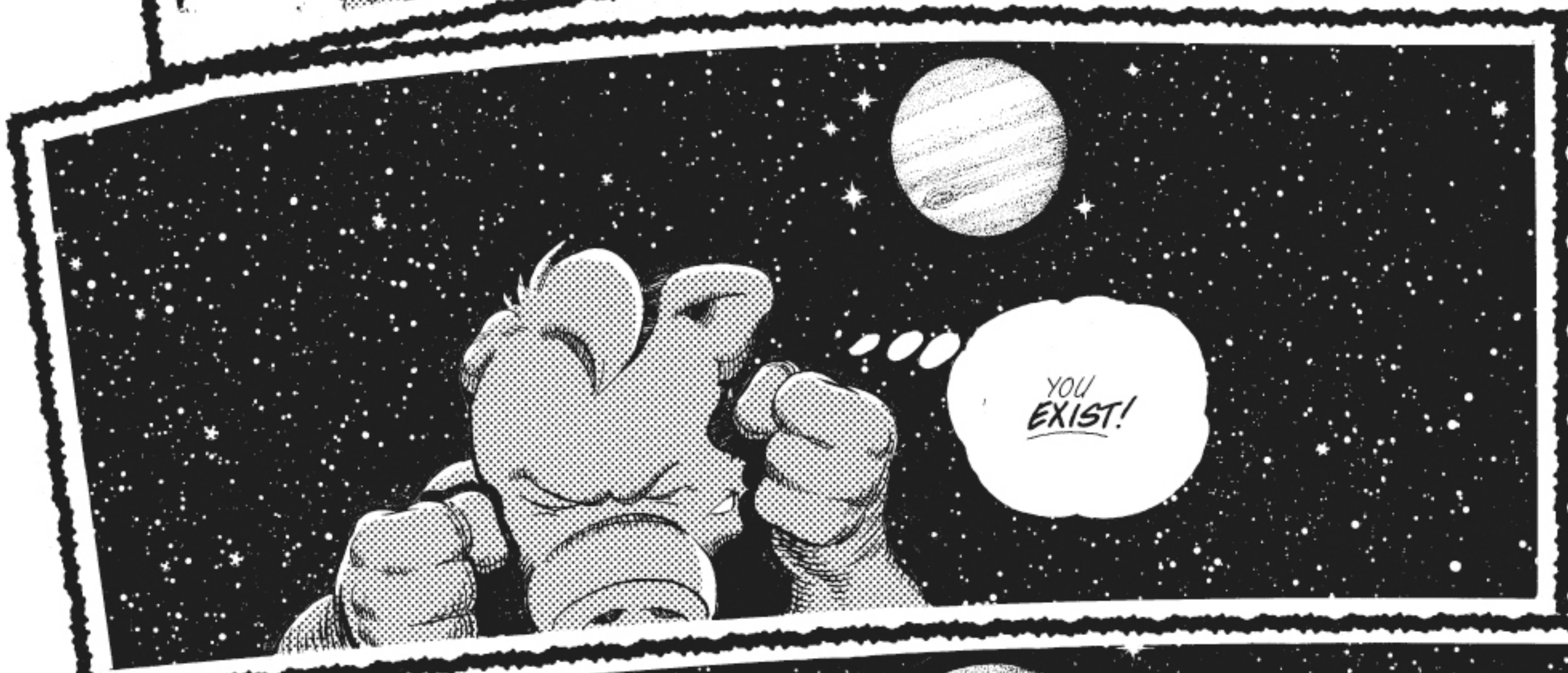
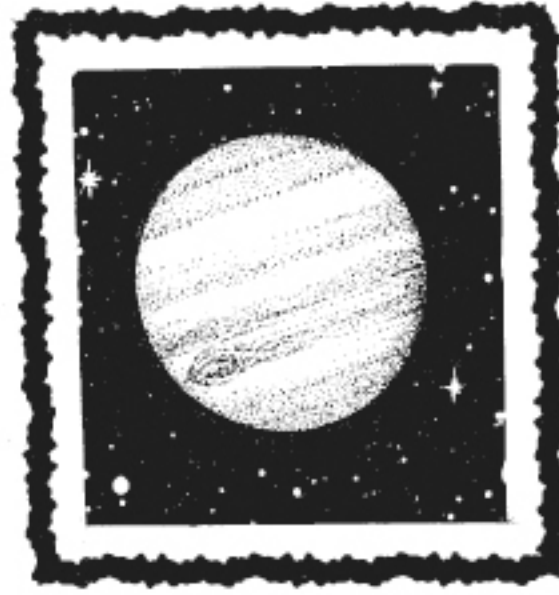
you Must
Be Getting
Home Now.

THANK YOU,
SIR, BUT I
MUST BE
GETTING
HOME
NOW.











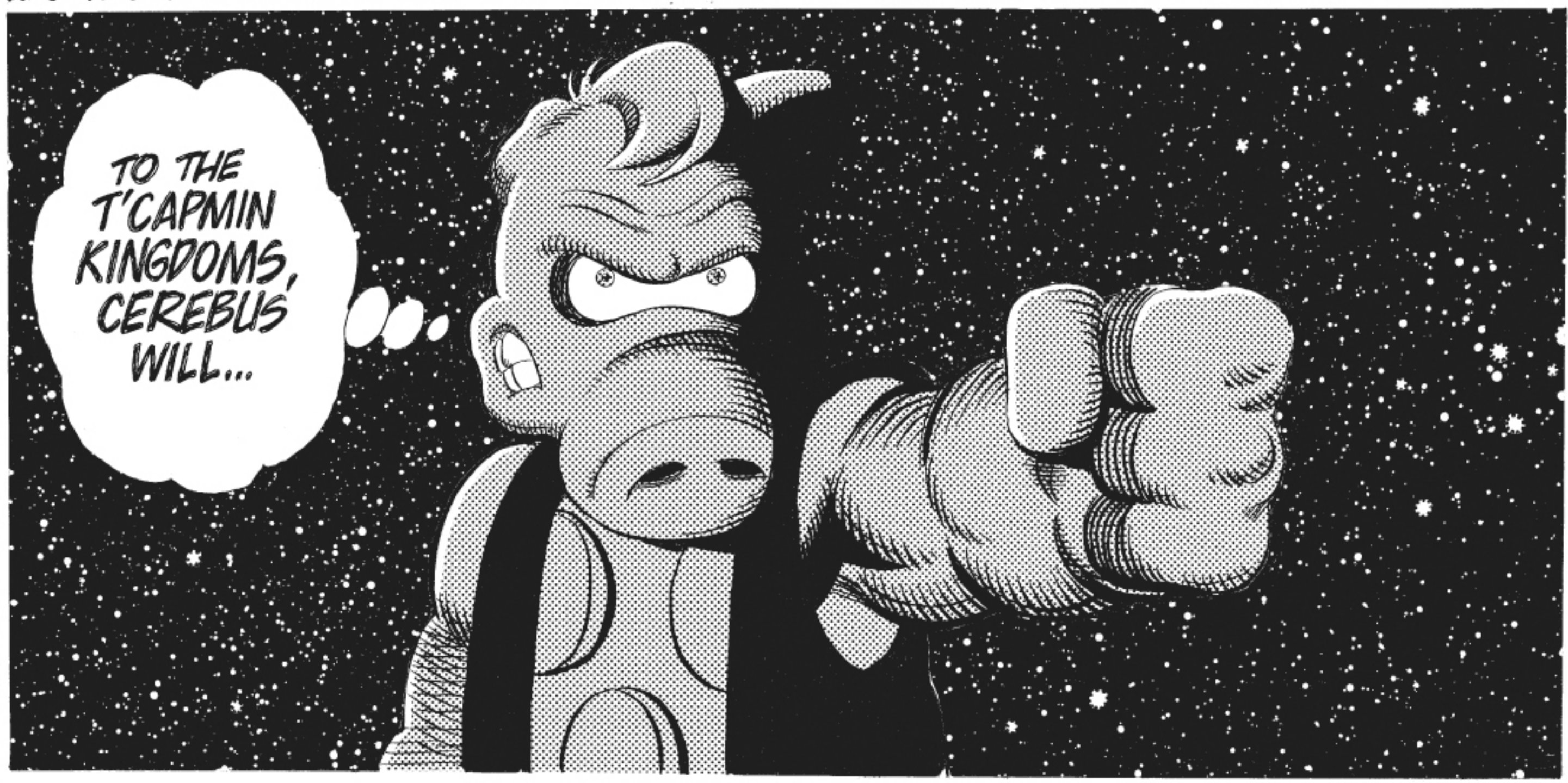
AND
CEREBUS
IS
YOUR
CHOSEN
ONE!



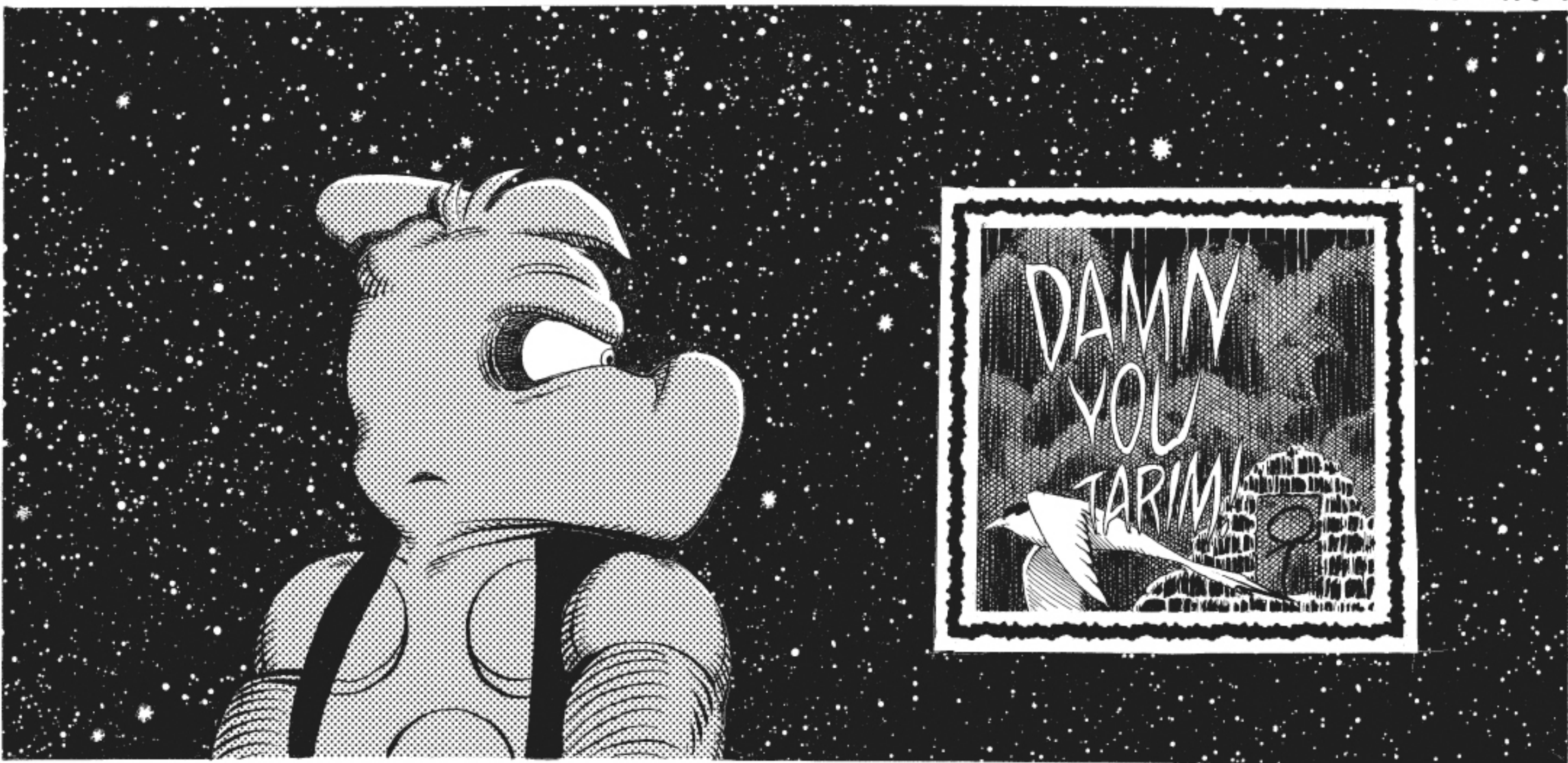
AND
CEREBUS WILL
CONQUER THE
KNOWN WORLD
IN YOUR
NAME!

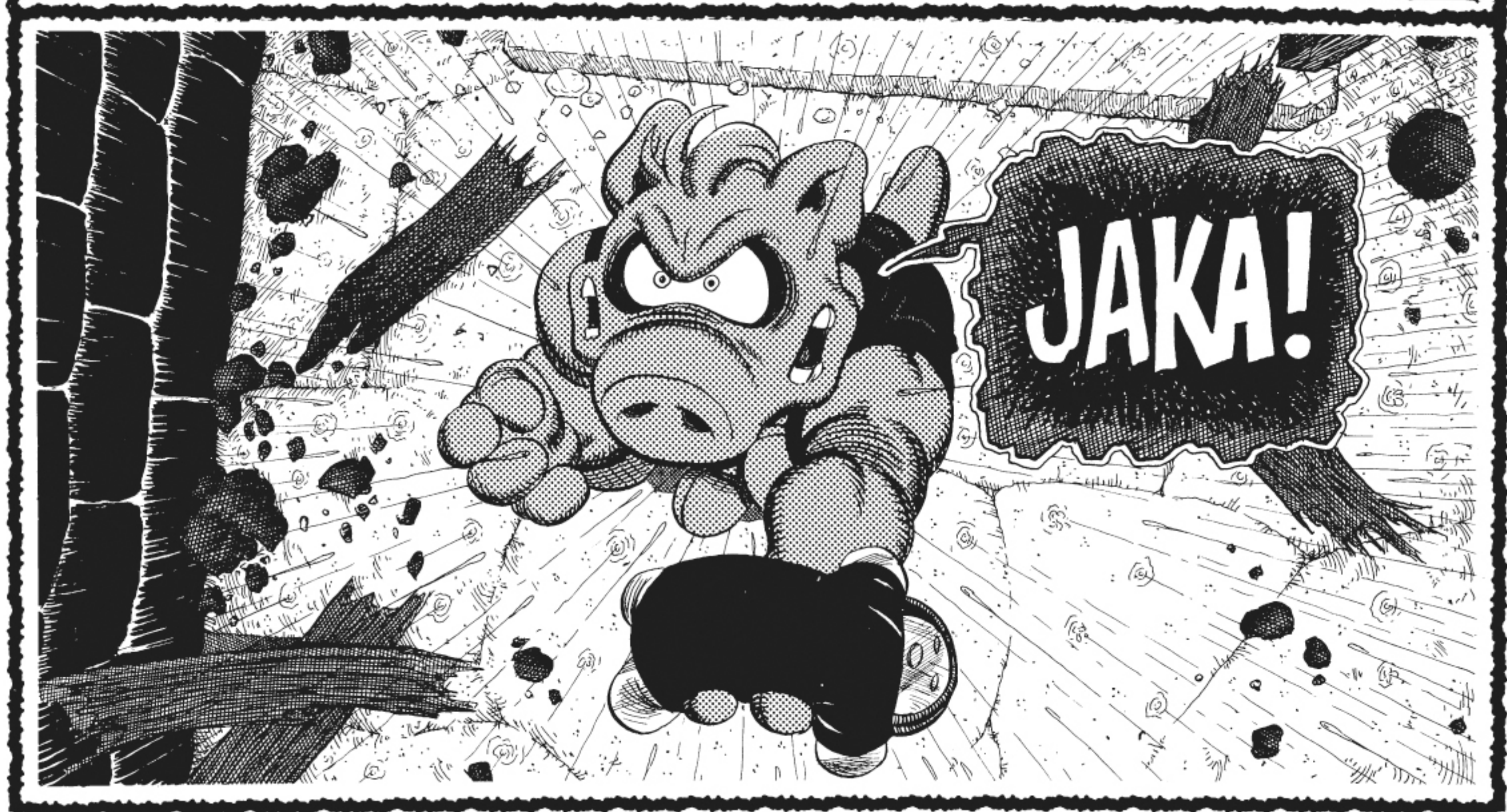
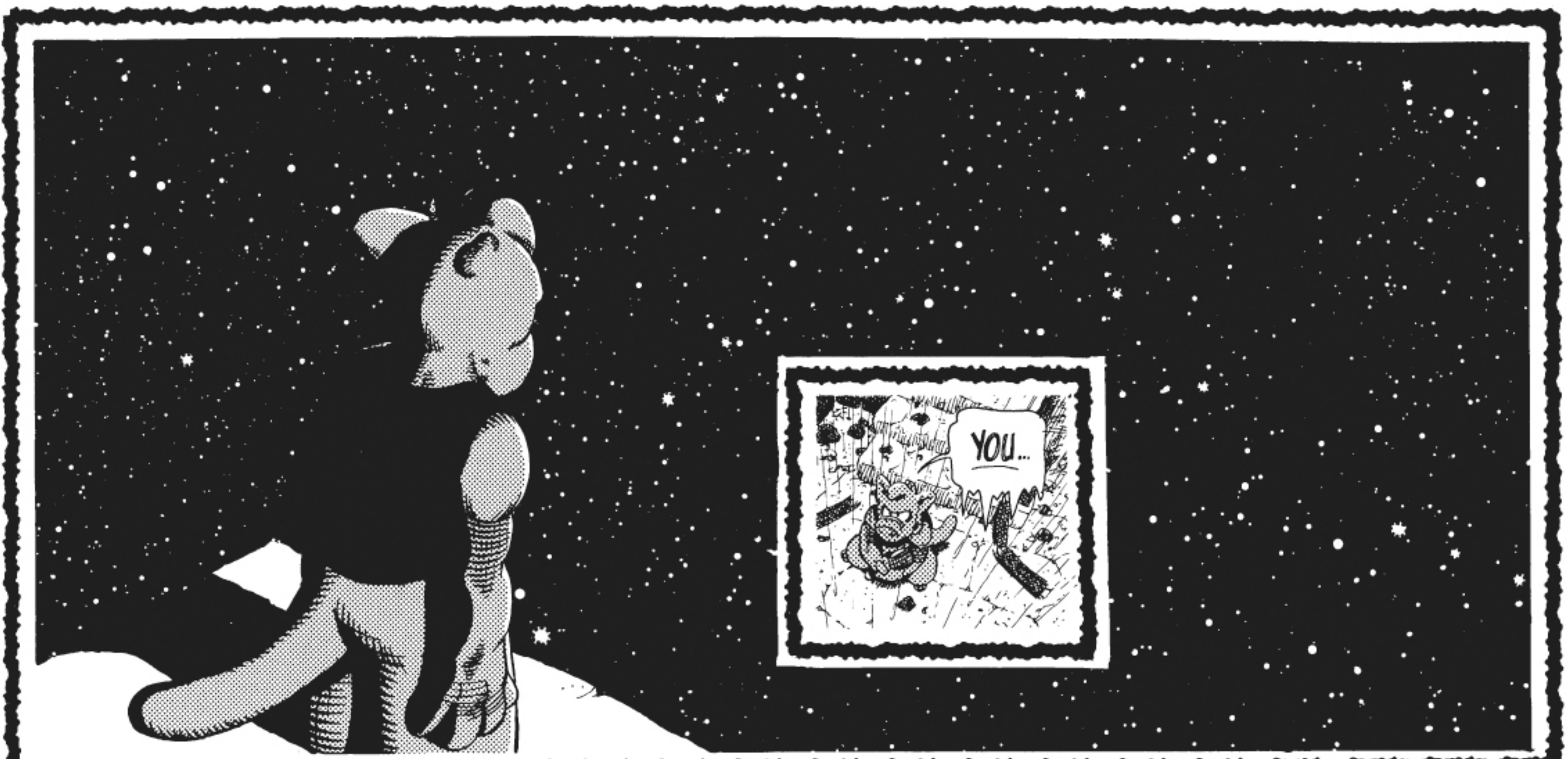


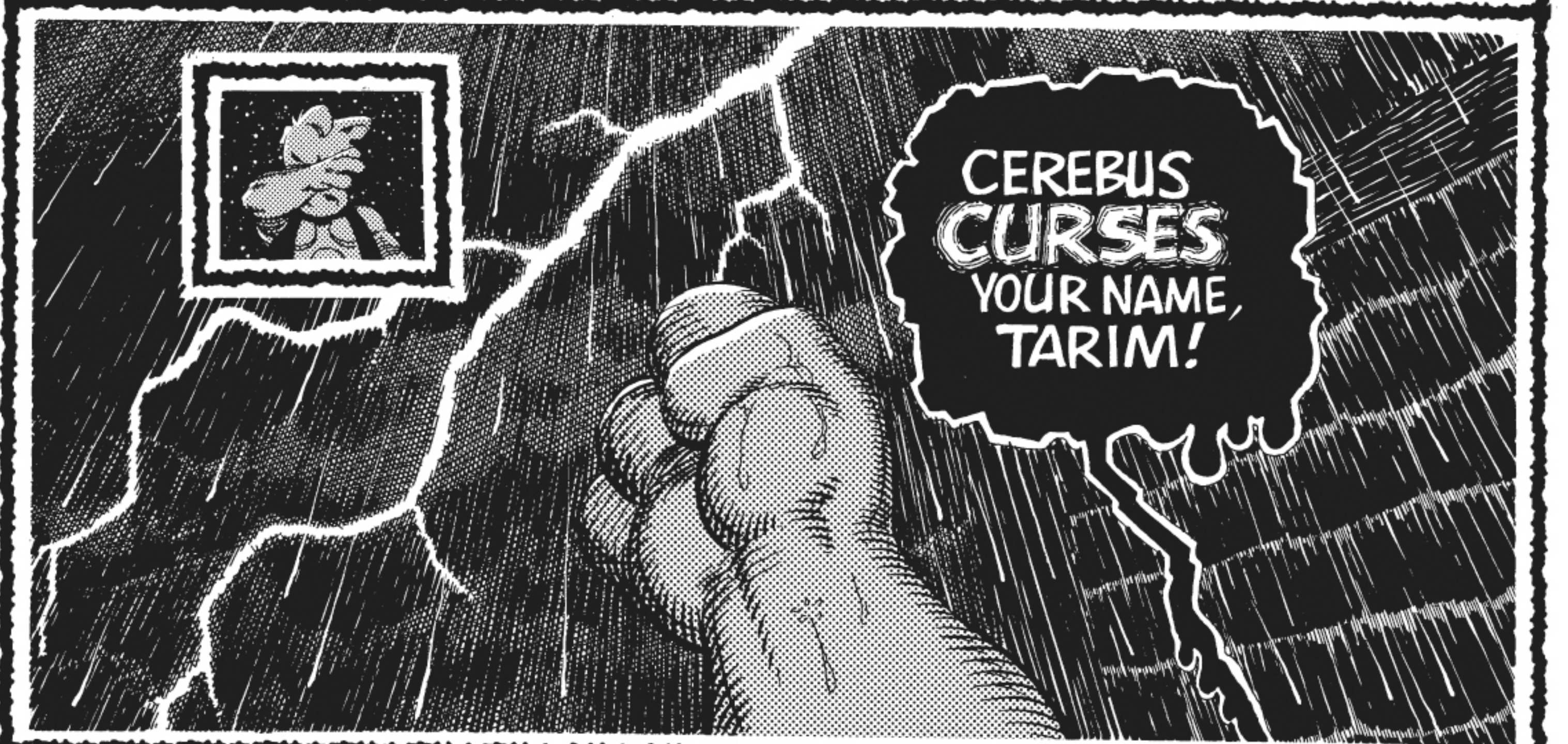
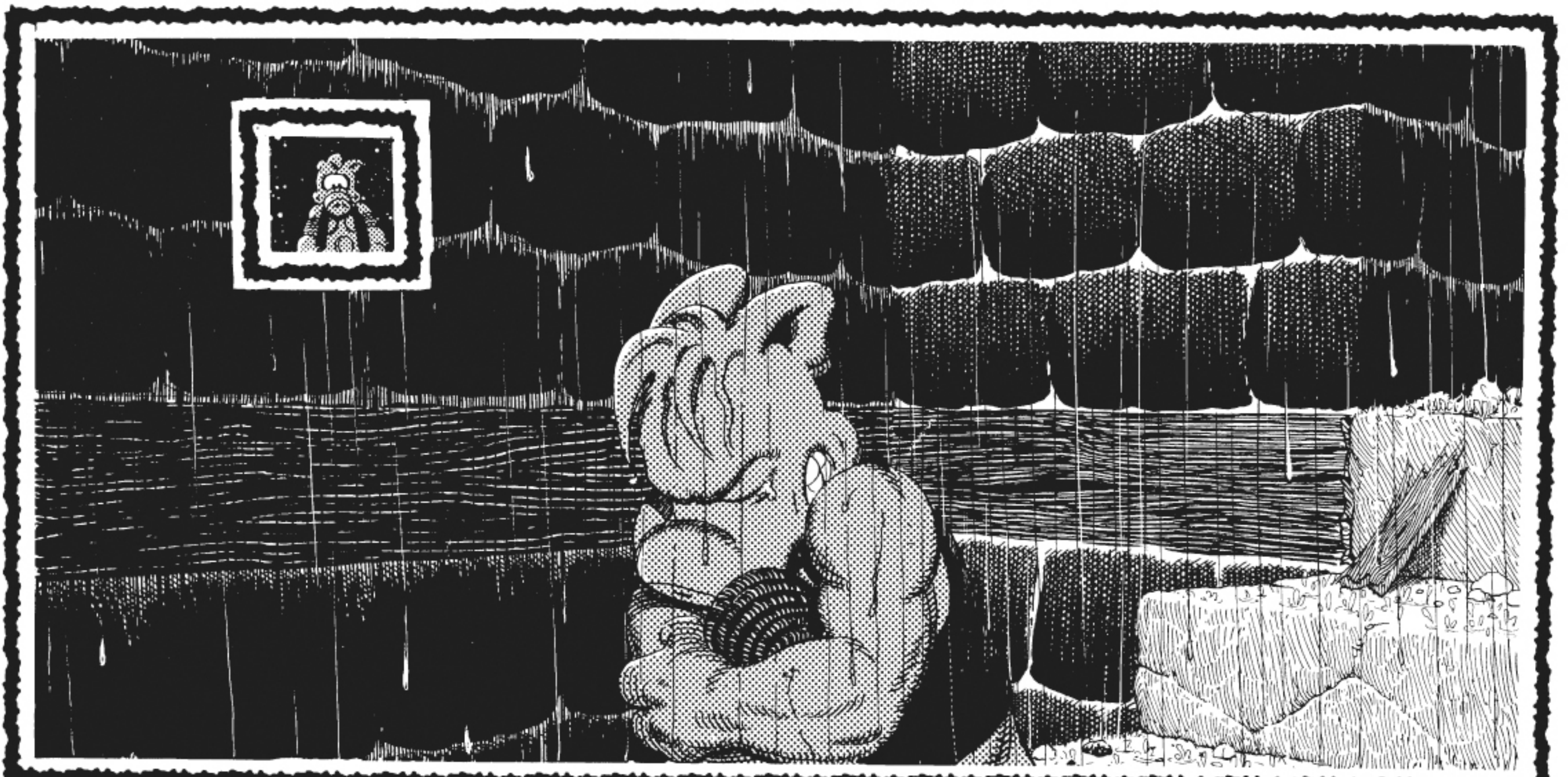
FROM THE
WASTELANDS
OF BOREALA
...

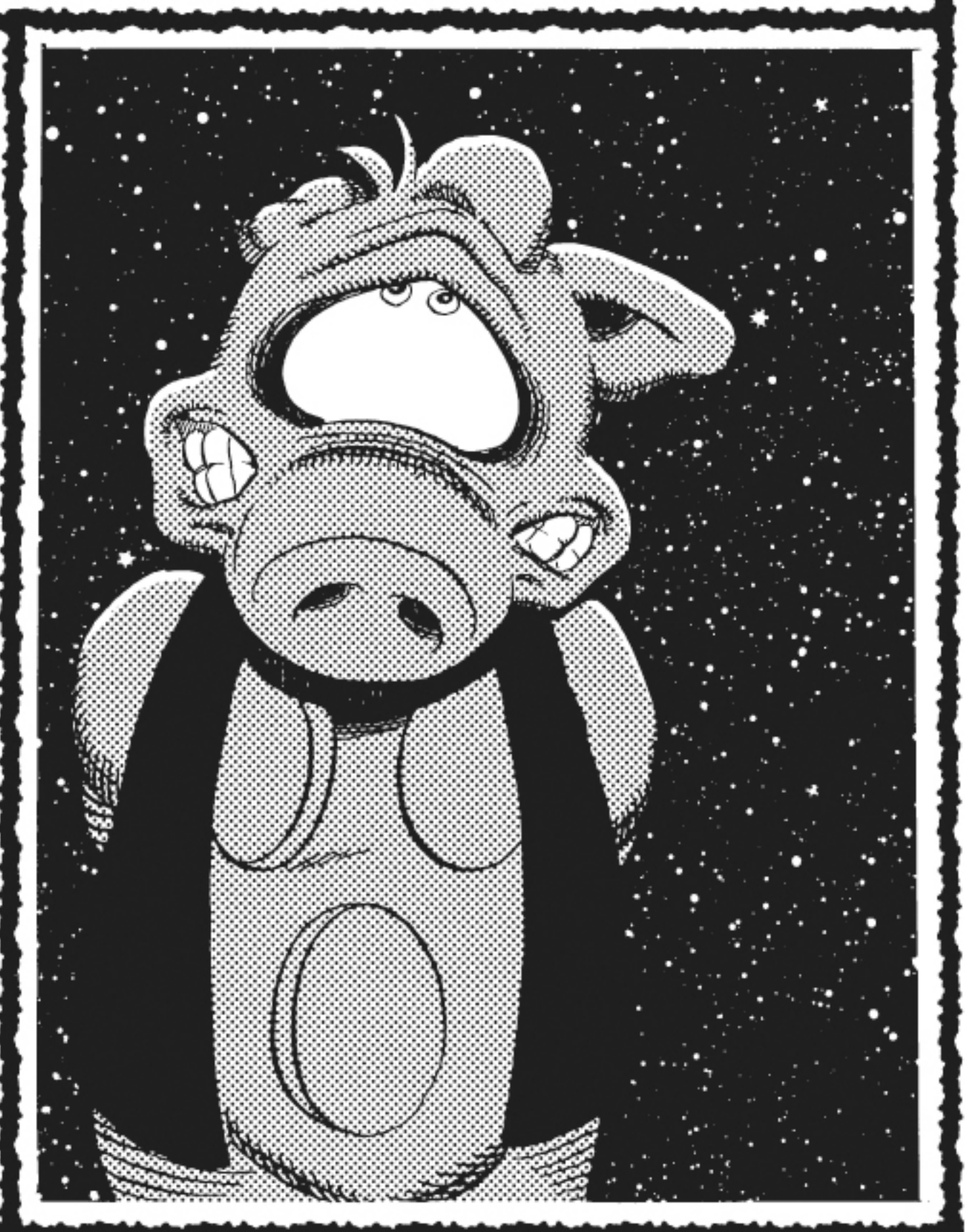
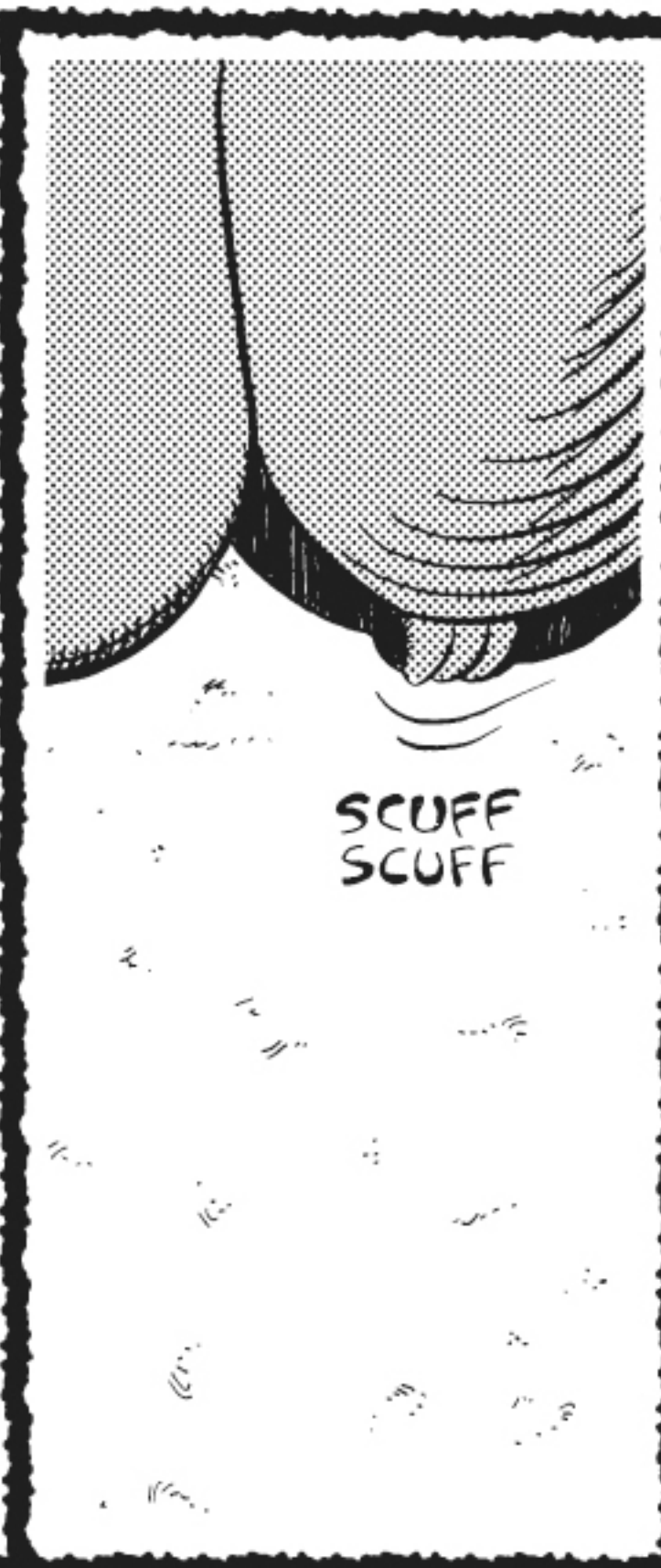
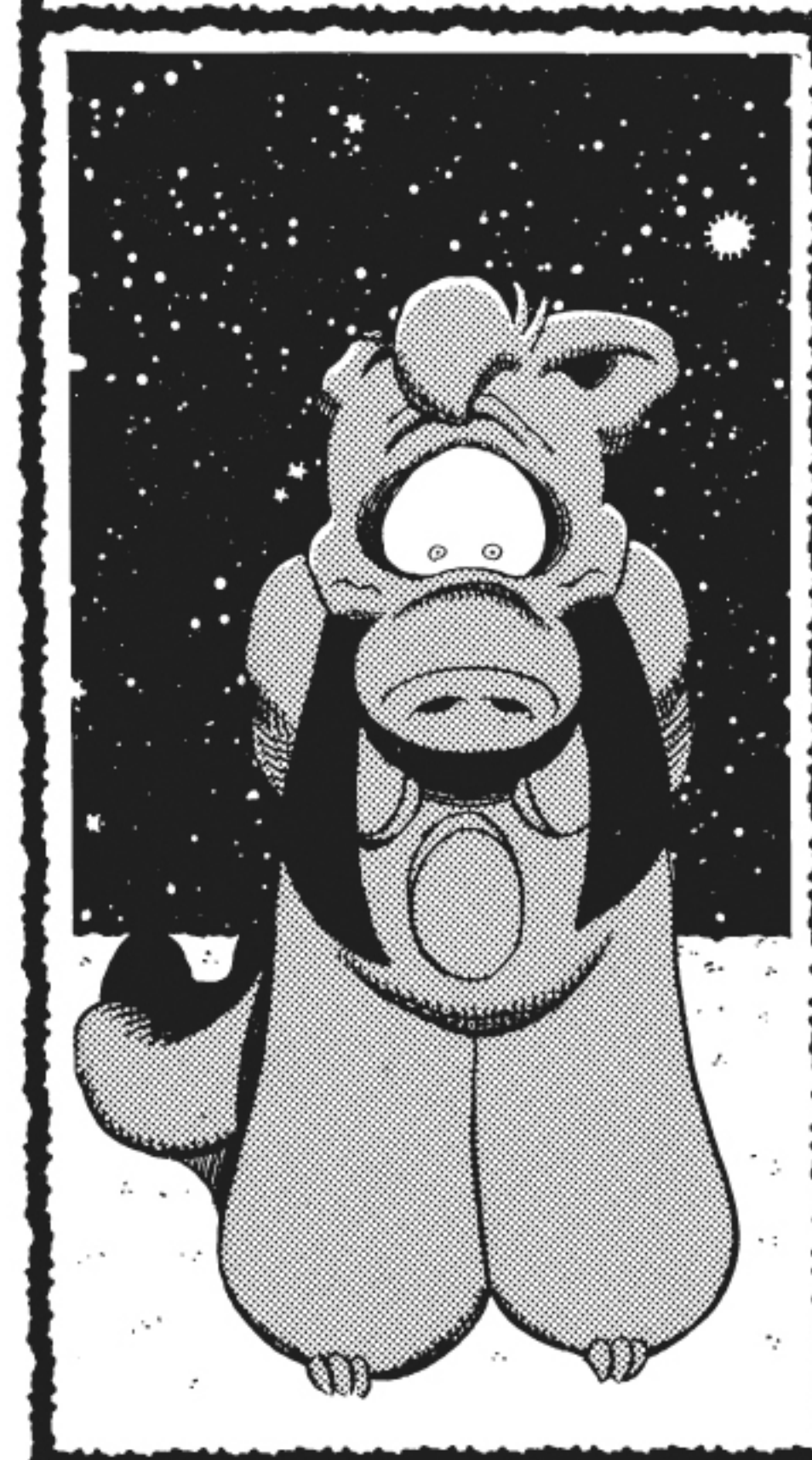


TO THE
T'CAPMIN
KINGDOMS,
CEREBUS
WILL...









STOP GRINNING!
STOP GRINNING!
YOU'LL JUST
MAKE HIM
MAD



CEREBUS
DIDN'T MEAN
IT, TARIM

CEREBUS DID
SO MEAN
IT?

SHUTUP
SHUTUP



FLATTERY!
TRY FLATTERY!
TARIM IS
A SLICKER
FOR FLATTERY!

NO-NOT
"SLICKER"
CEREBUS
MEANT
uh...



PRAISE
MIGHTY
TARIM!

KILLER OF
DEFENSELESS
WOMEN

NO!
CEREBUS
DIDN'T MEAN
THAT!



TARIM
KNOWS
ALL!

MIGHTY
TARIM!
CEREBUS
WORSHIPS
YOU!

SO YOU
WON'T
HURT
CEREBUS

NO!
NO!



CEREBUS WORSHIPS
YOU BECAUSE YOU'RE
A BIG BULLY WHO
CAN CRUSH CEREBUS
LIKE A BUG!



NONO! CEREBUS LOVES
YOU TARIM UNLESS YOU
DON'T WANT HIM TO IN
WHICH CASE CEREBUS
IS AFRAID OF YOU
BECAUSE CEREBUS
HATES YOU!!



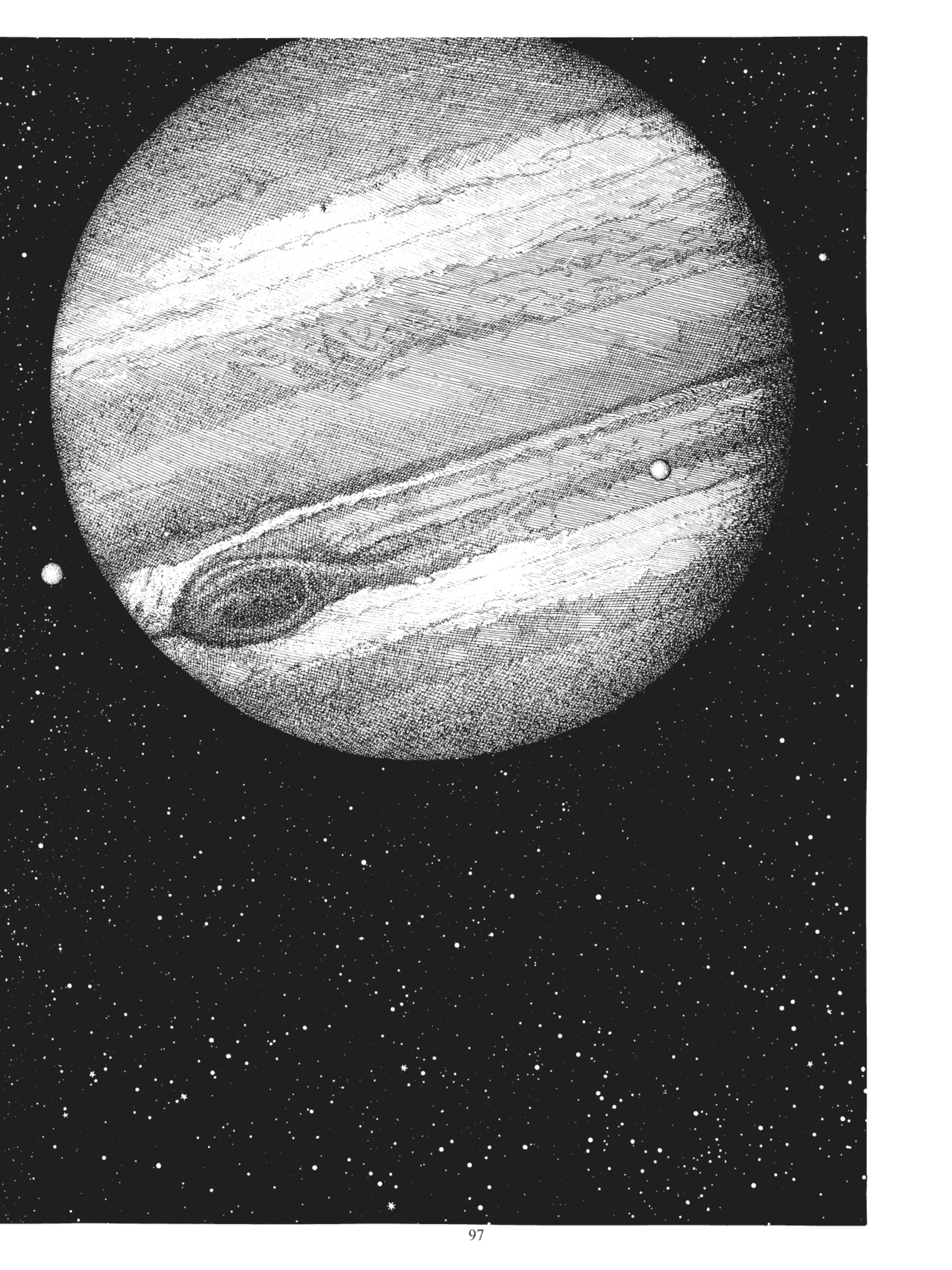
NONO! CEREBUS MEANT
HE WORSHIPS LOVES
ADORES RESPECTS
YOU!! YOUR WAYS ARE
MYSTERIOUS LIKE THE
WAY YOU MURDER
INNOCENT PEOPLE!!



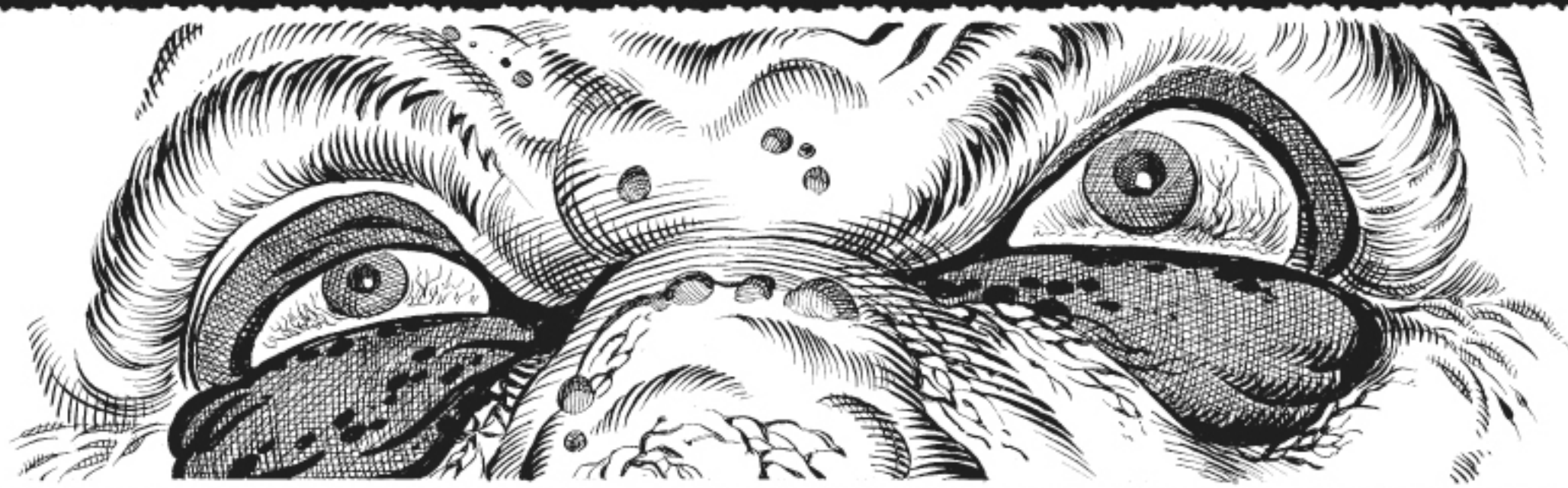




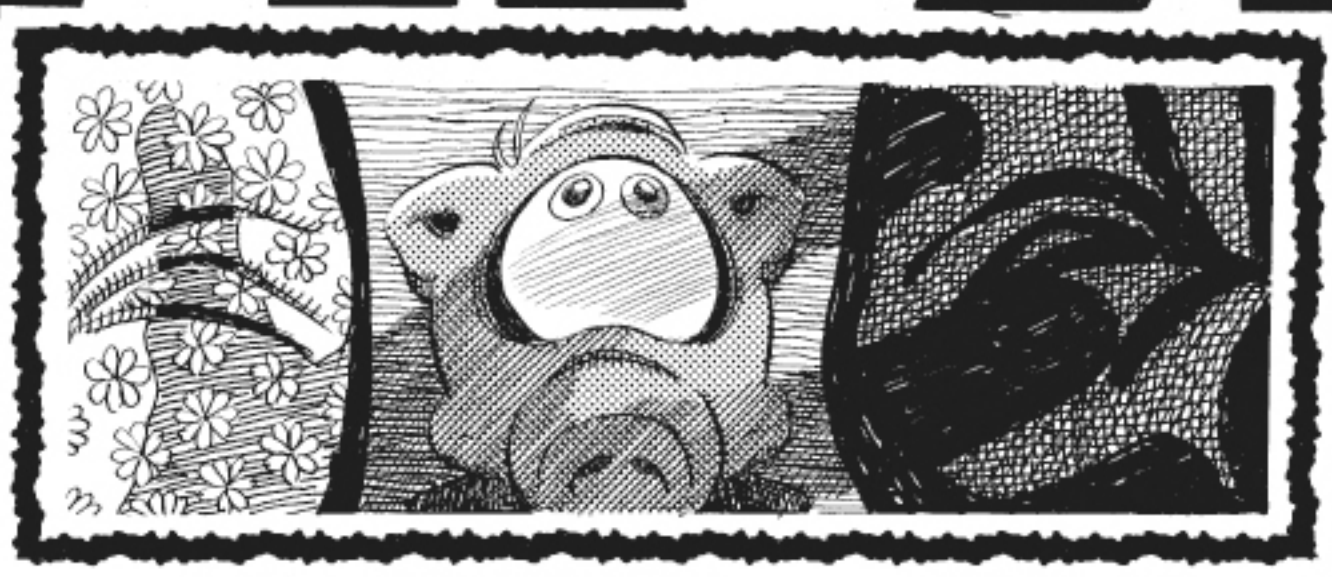




Whose Single CRIMSON
EYE SEES into Every
SOUL



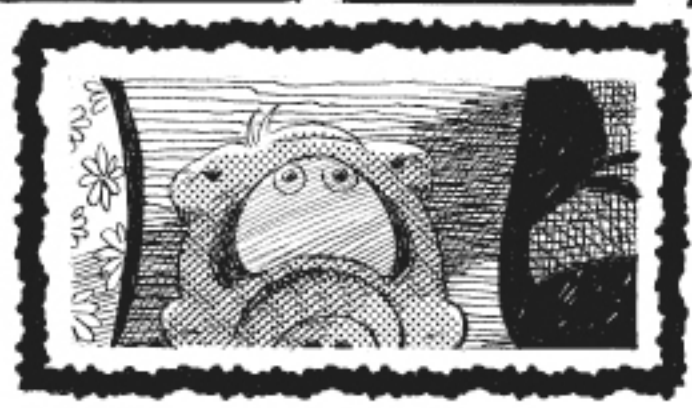
SO FAST that ALL the
OCEANS in ALL the
WORLD

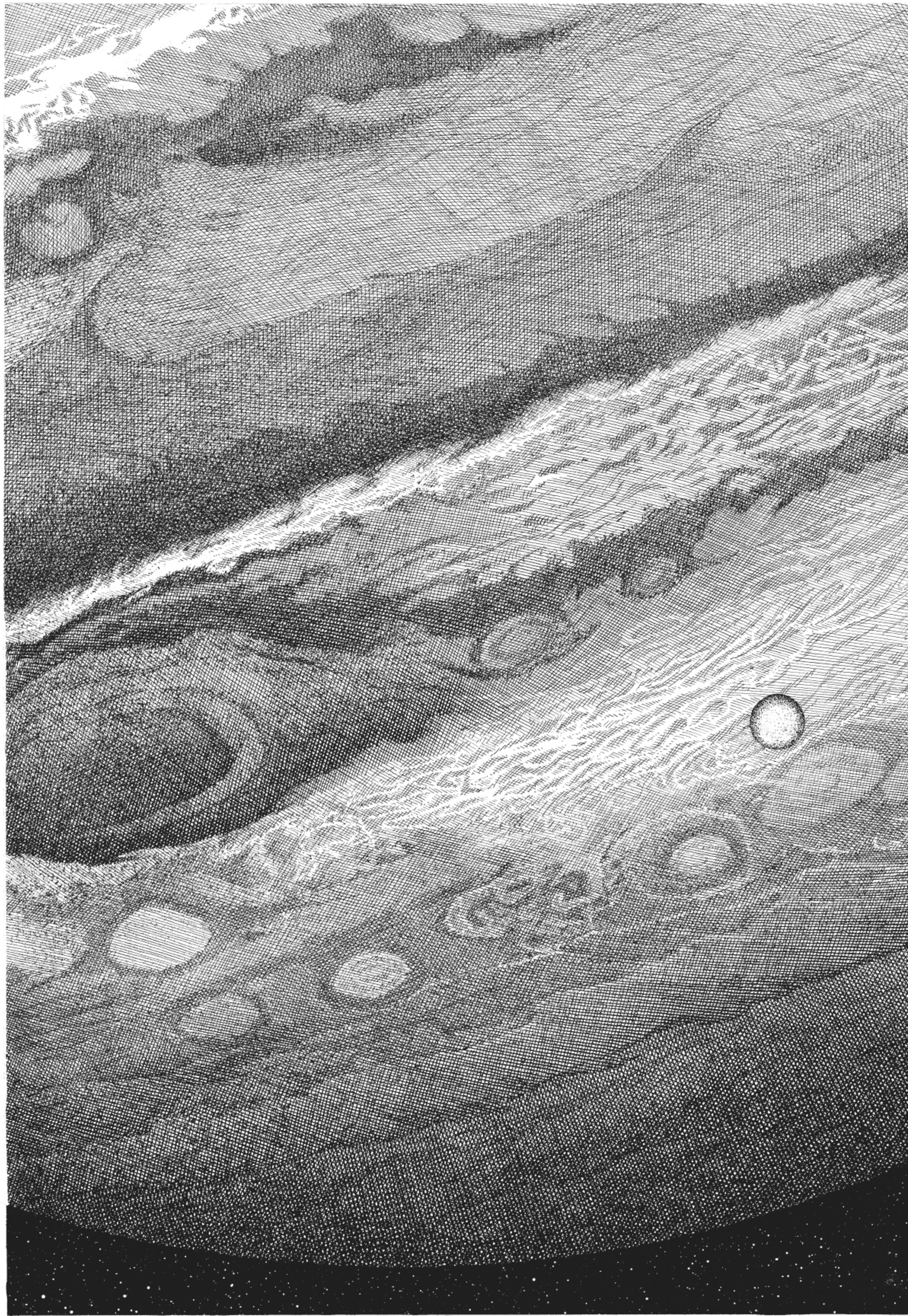


are!
TO HIM!
no more than
the smallest part
of the
smallest
drop
of rain



AND WHEN YOUR DAY OF
JUDGEMENT
COMES





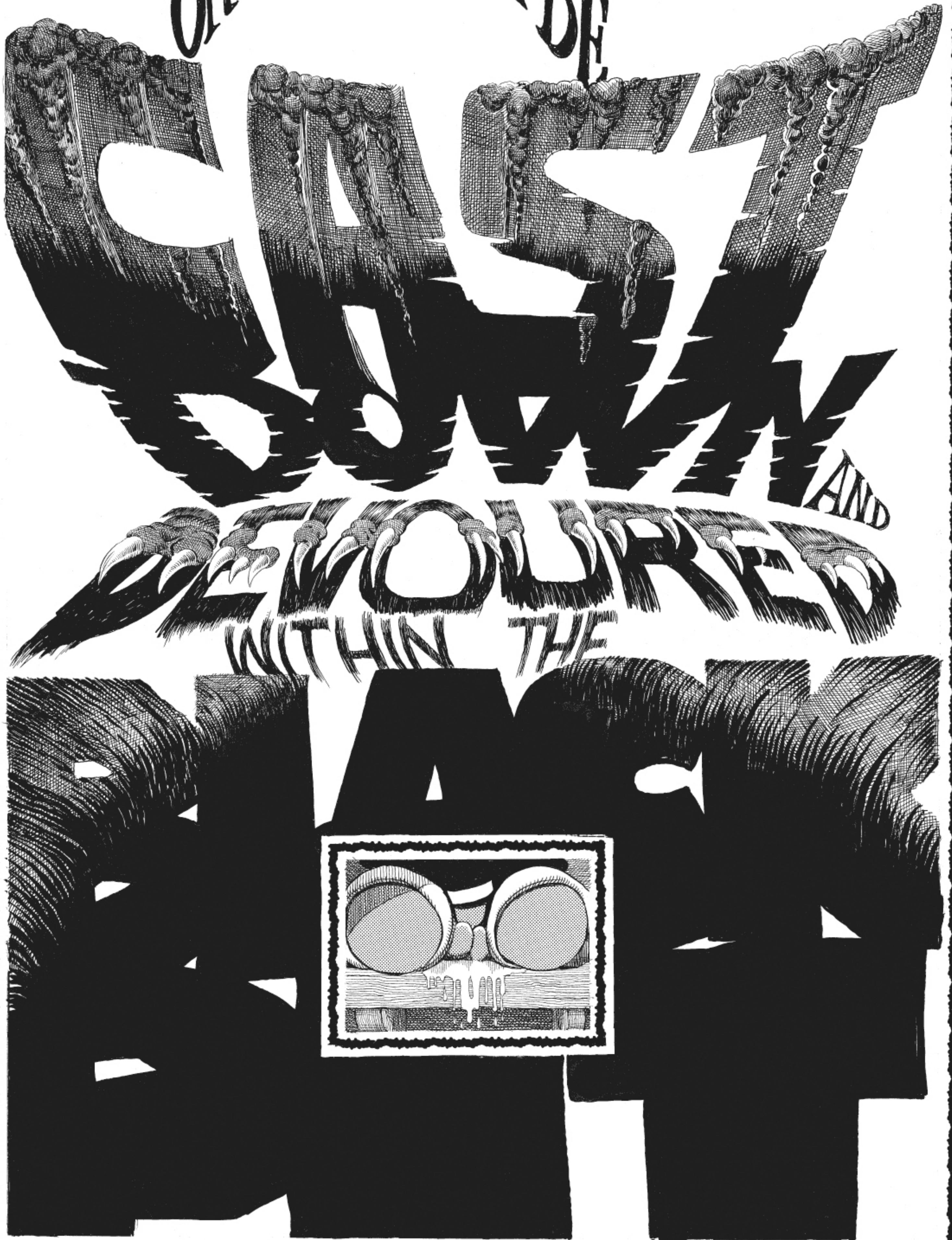


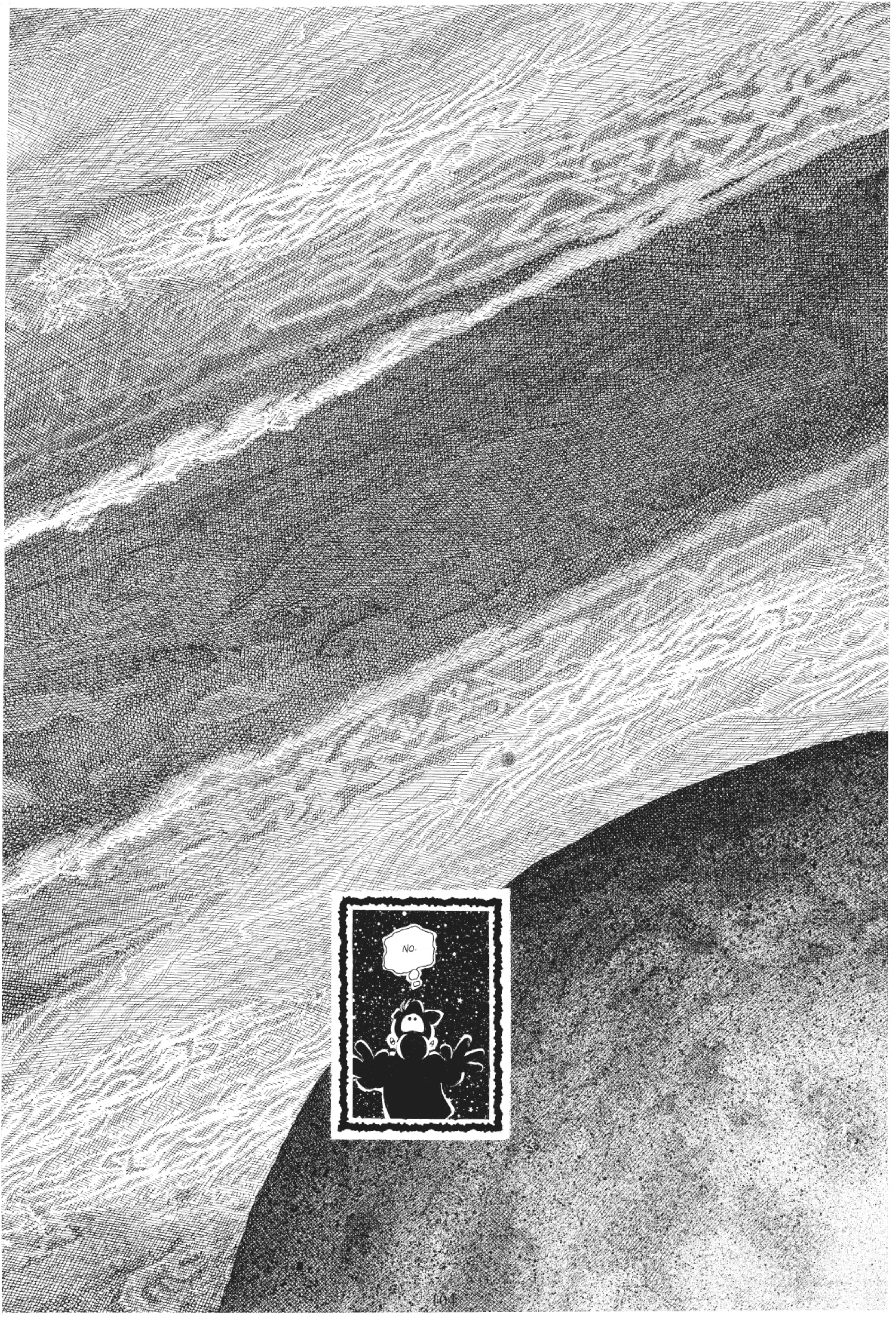
WILL YOU STAND BEFORE
the LIVING TARIM
AS ONE WHO KEPT
HIS LAWS AND REVERED
HIS NAME? WILL YOU
BE REWARDED by an
ETERNITY
of JOY?
and
PEACE?

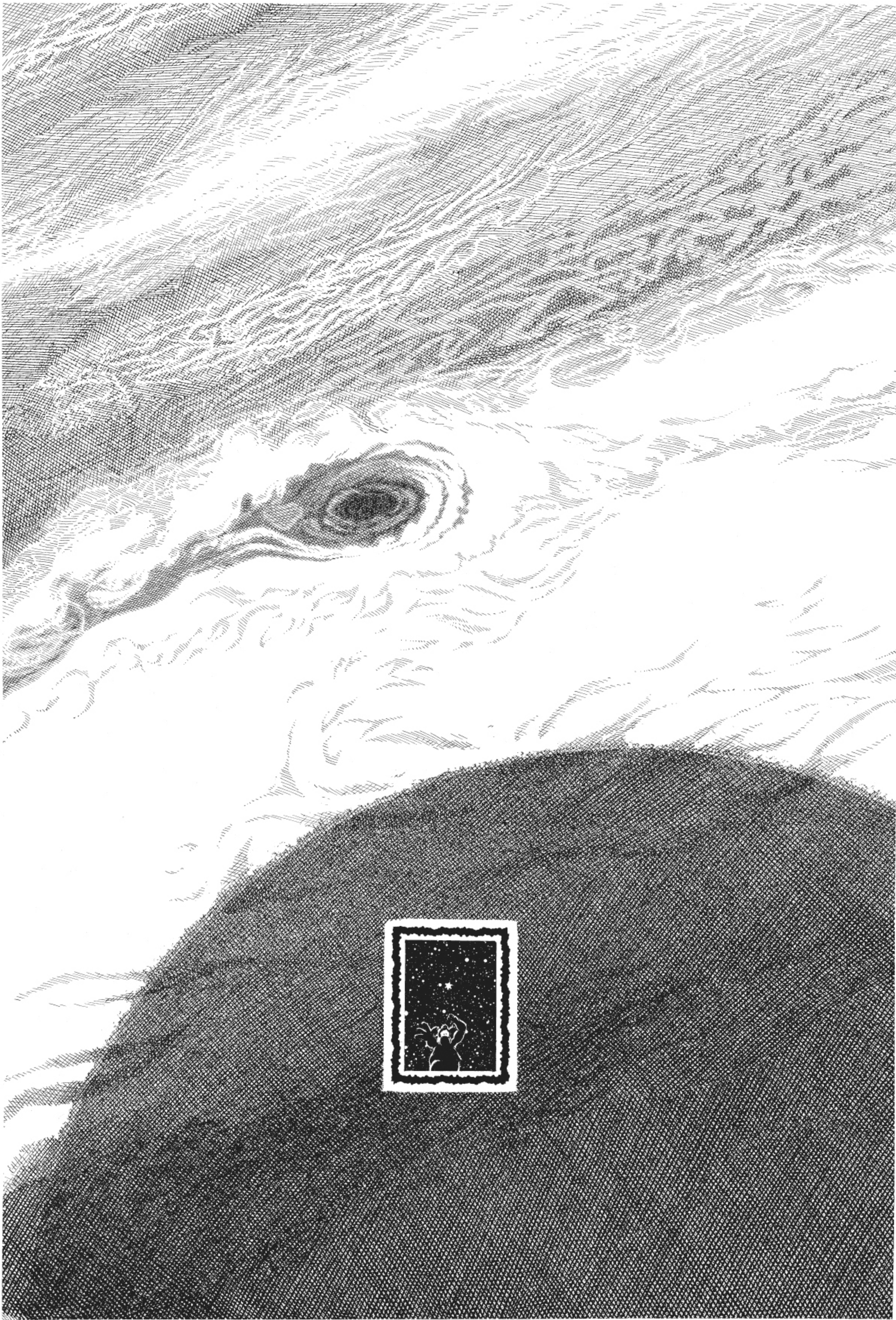


YET!
PEACE?
PEACE?

OR WILL YOU BE





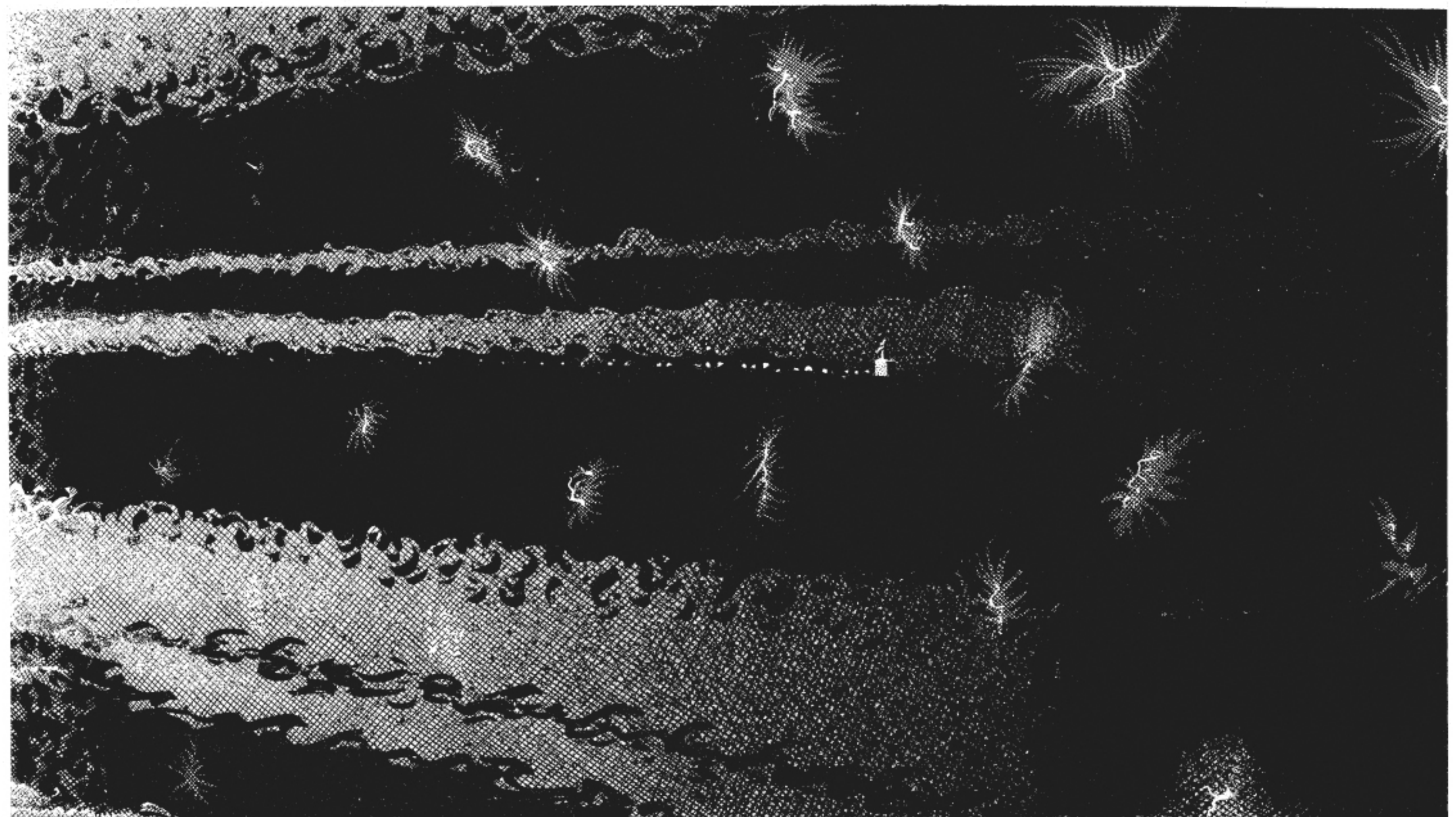
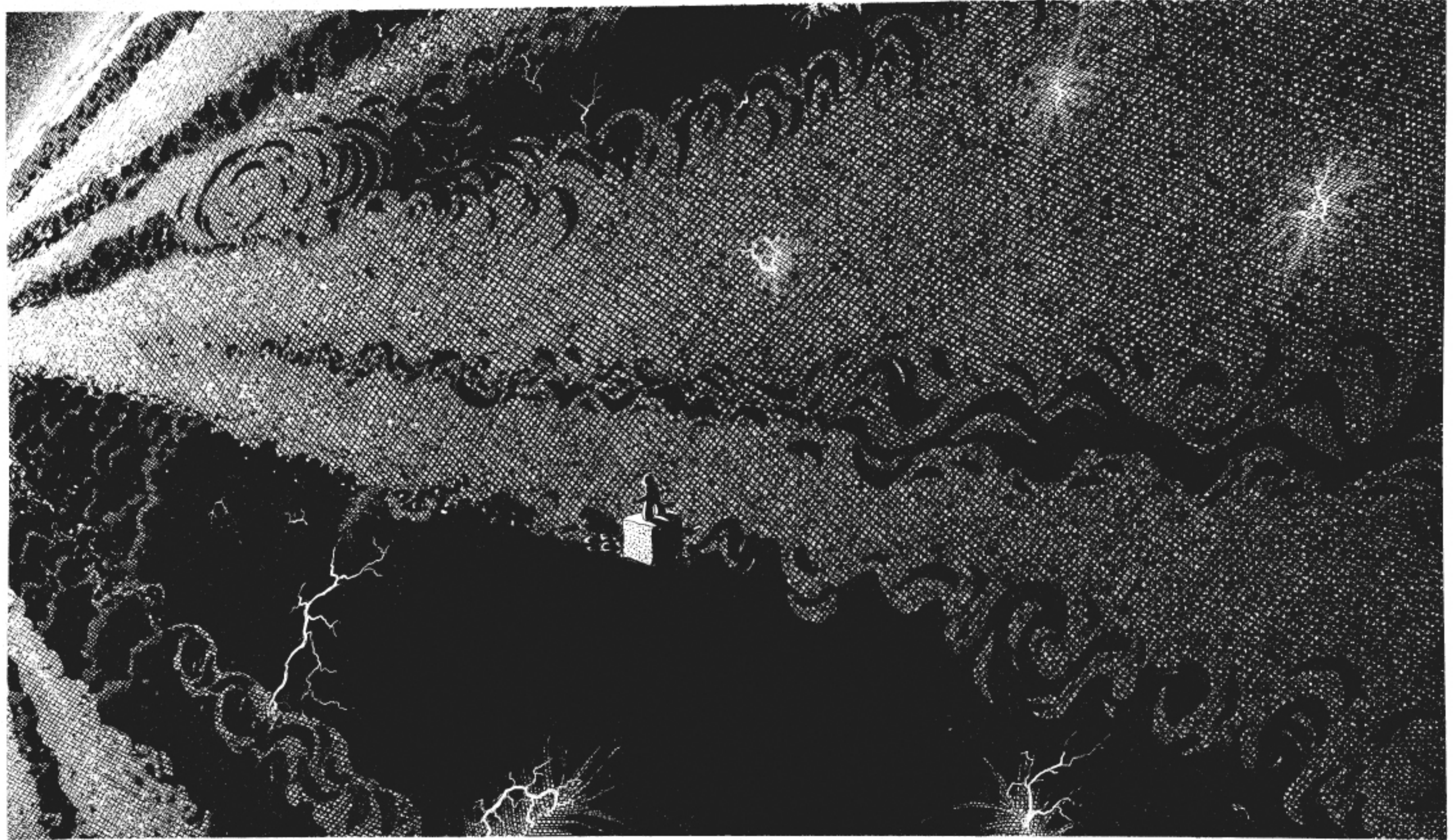




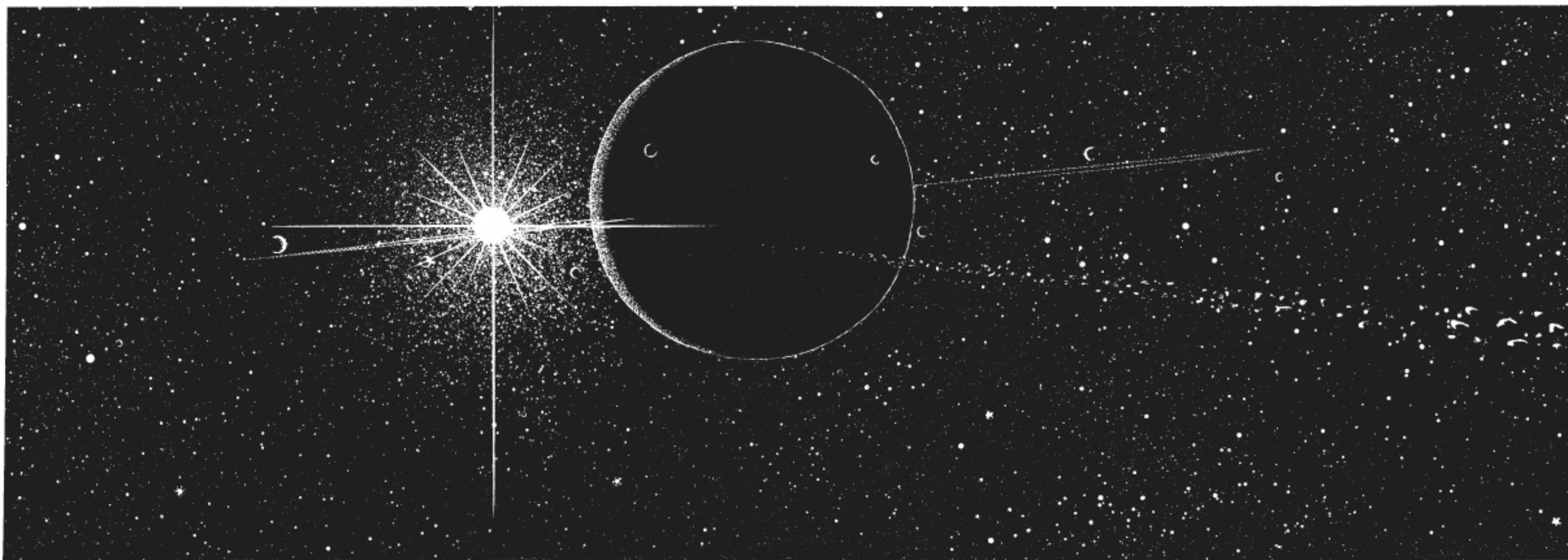
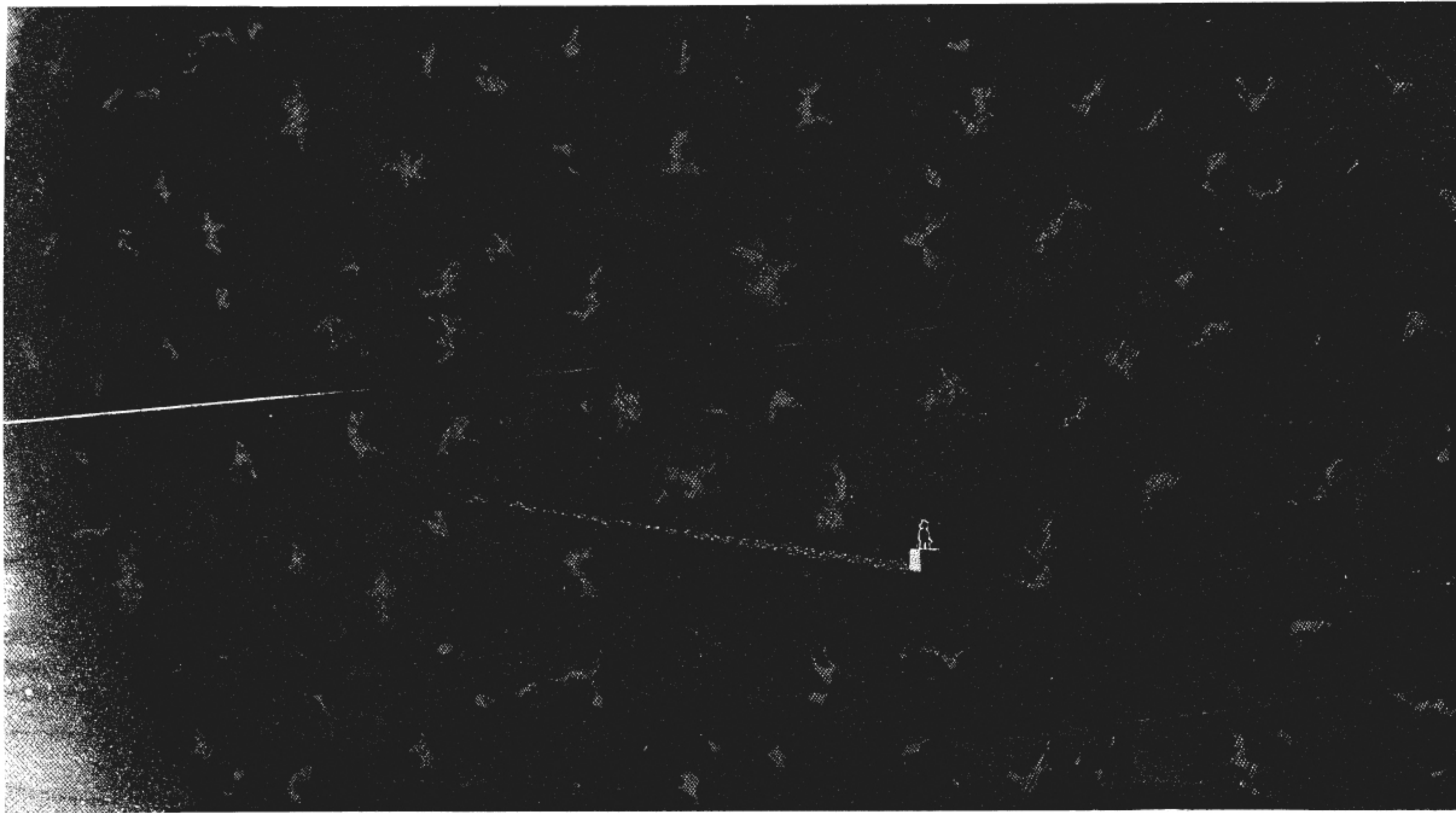


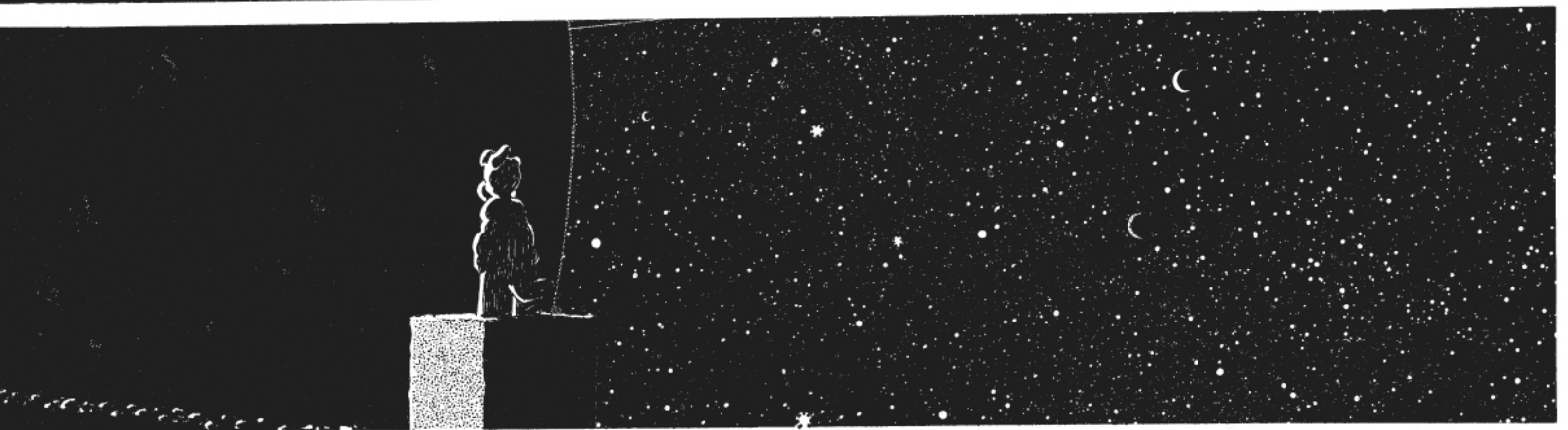
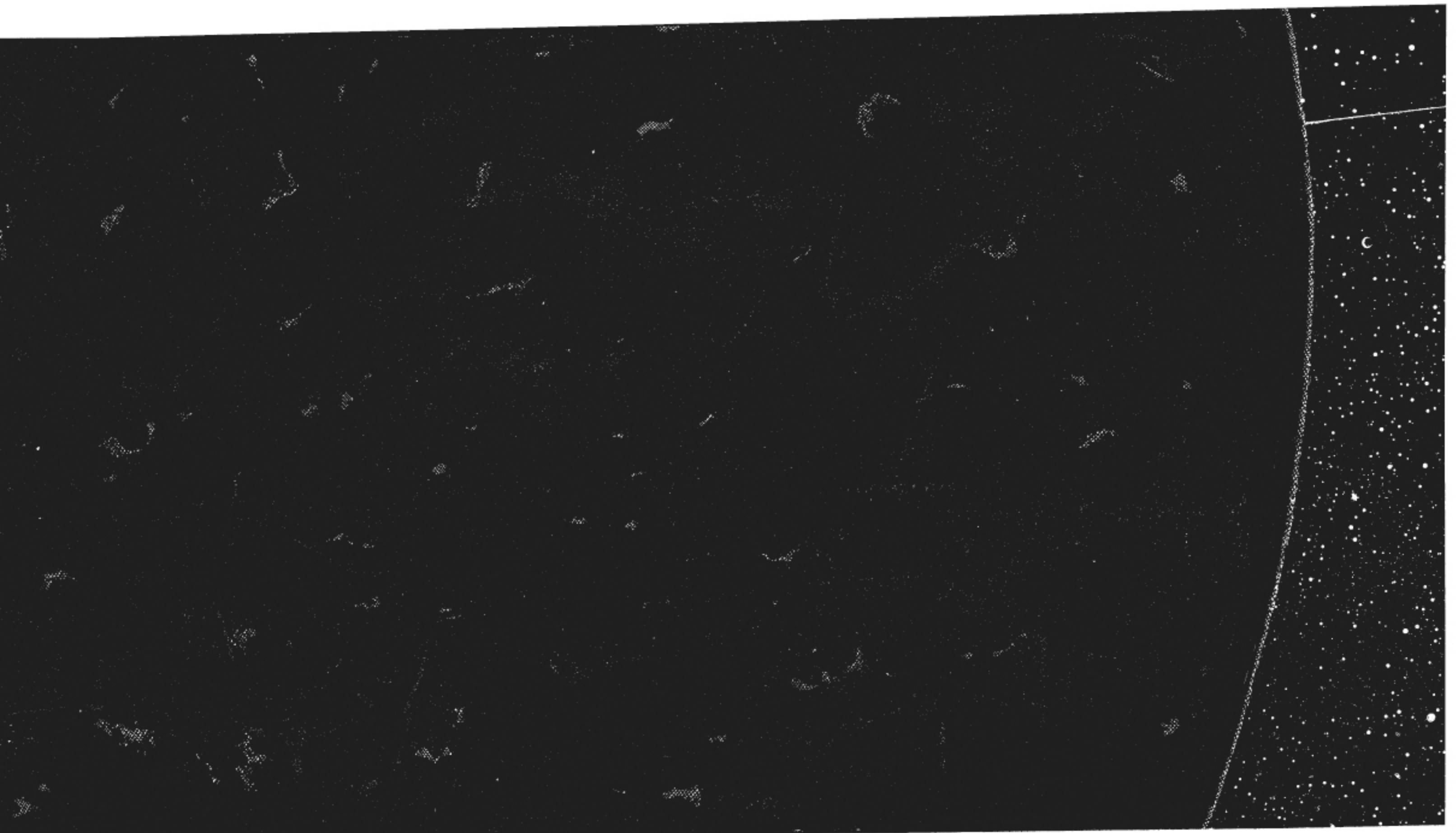












THANK YOU, TARIM...
THANK YOU THANK
YOU THANK YOU THANK
YOU FOR SPARING
CEREBUS

PRAISE
TARIM.

PRAISE
TARIM.



PRAISE TARIM
FOR NOT
MINDING
THAT CEREBUS
~~IS A~~
~~FAGGOT!~~
SHUT UP!



ASTORIA SAID
CEREBUS HAS A
PENIS AND AN
ANGINA AND THAT
MAKES CEREBUS
~~A~~
~~FAGGOT!~~
SHUT UP!



BEING A
~~FAGGOT~~
IS A
~~SIN~~



PLEASE, TARIM.
CEREBUS
ISN'T A
FAGGOT.

CEREBUS
~~HATES~~
FAGGOTS.



WHAT ABOUT THE
TIME CEREBUS GOT
A "WOODY" WATCHING
BEAR SWIMMING
~~UNDER THAT~~
~~WATERFALL!~~
SHUT UP!...





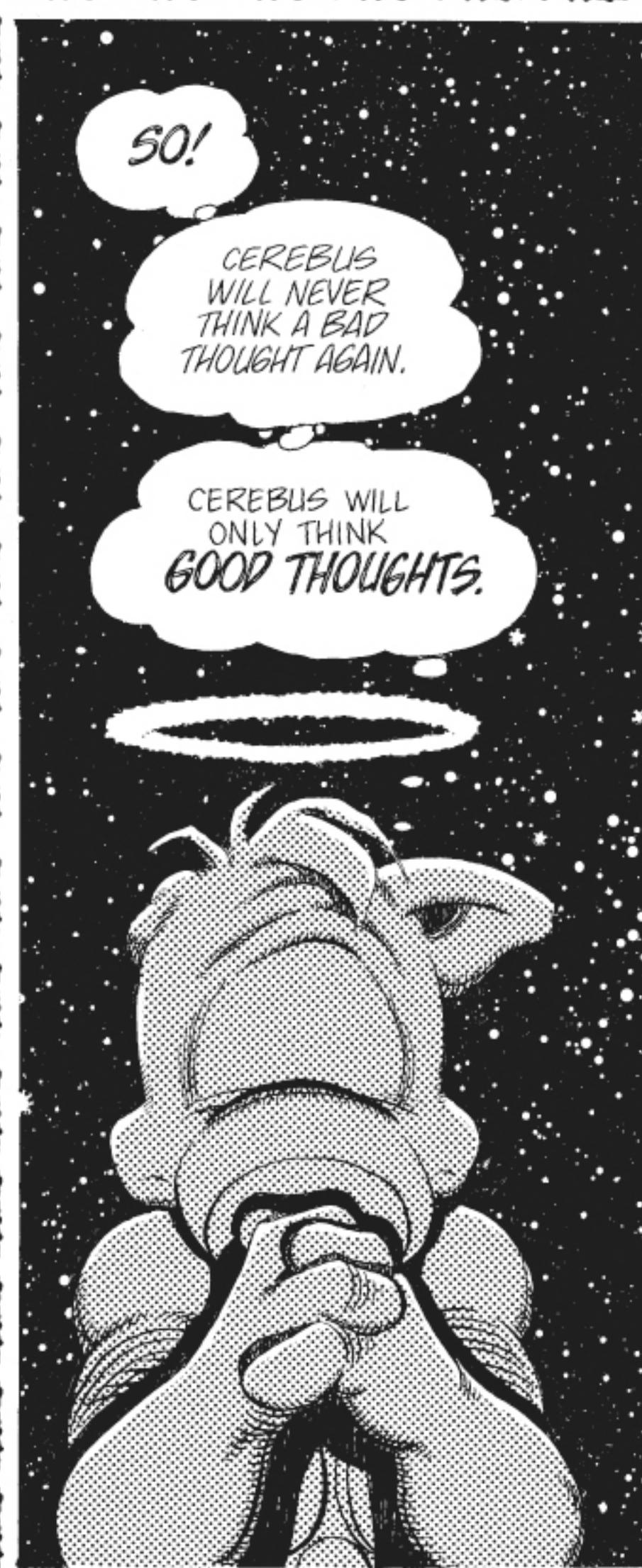
TARIM KNOWS
EVERYTHING
CEREBUS
THINKS.

EVERYTHING!



AYE.

AYE!



SO!

CEREBUS
WILL NEVER
THINK A BAD
THOUGHT AGAIN.

CEREBUS WILL
ONLY THINK
GOOD THOUGHTS.



BECAUSE IF CEREBUS
WAS TO THINK ABOUT
SAY, ~~BUGGERING~~
~~A FIVE YEAR OLD~~
~~GIRL~~ THEN THAT
WOULD BE A
SIN ☼



SO--
CEREBUS WON'T
THINK ABOUT
~~BUGGERING~~
~~A FIVE YEAR OLD~~
~~SIRLITA LADY~~
OR A LUG!!



OR TYING A FIVE
YEAR OLD GIRL'S
HANDS BEHIND
HER BACK AND
MAKING HER GIVE
CEREBUS A
SHUT UP

OR THE TIME
THAT CEREBUS
WATCHED HIS
MOTHER GETTING

**SHIT
UP!**



LOOK.



THIS IS
RIDICULOUS.



YOU KNOW
WHO CEREBUS
IS...

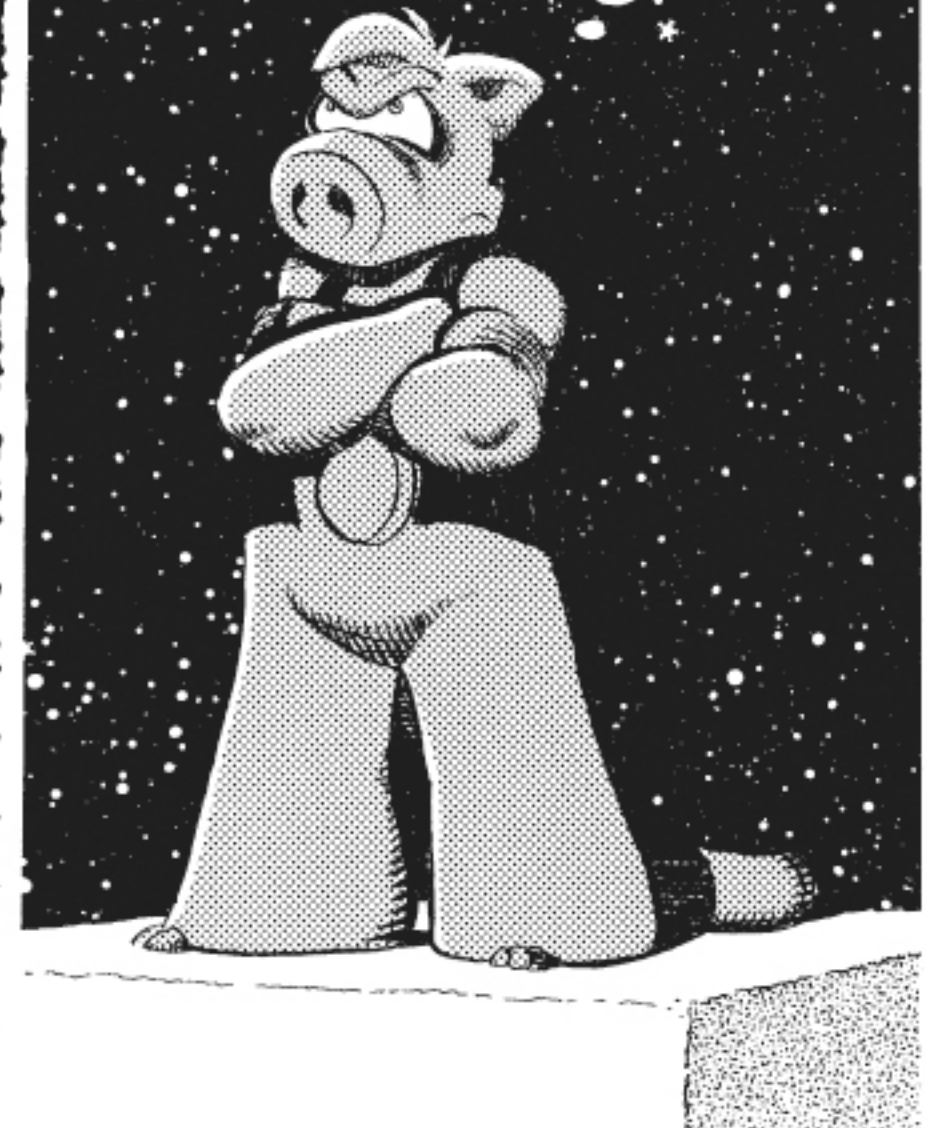
YOU
MADE
CEREBUS.



IF YOU WANTED
CEREBUS TO BE
DIFFERENT, YOU
COULD'VE MADE
CEREBUS
DIFFERENT.

RIGHT?

RIGHT.



IF A LOAF OF
BREAD IS BAKED
WRONG, WHO
DO YOU BLAME?

THE
BREAD?

OR THE
BAKER?



BESIDES...

THERE ARE A
LOT WORSE
PEOPLE THAN
CEREBUS.

A
LOT
WORSE,
LIKE...



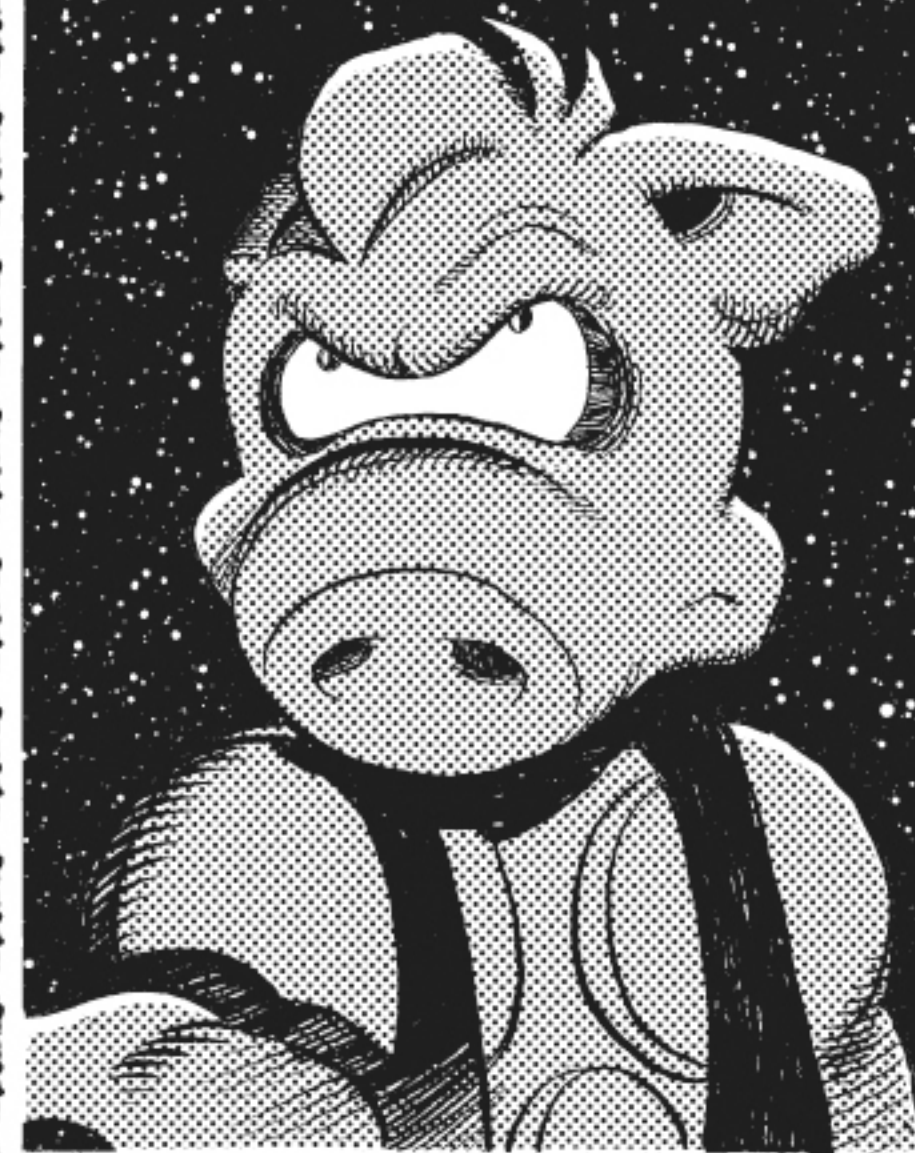
Like...



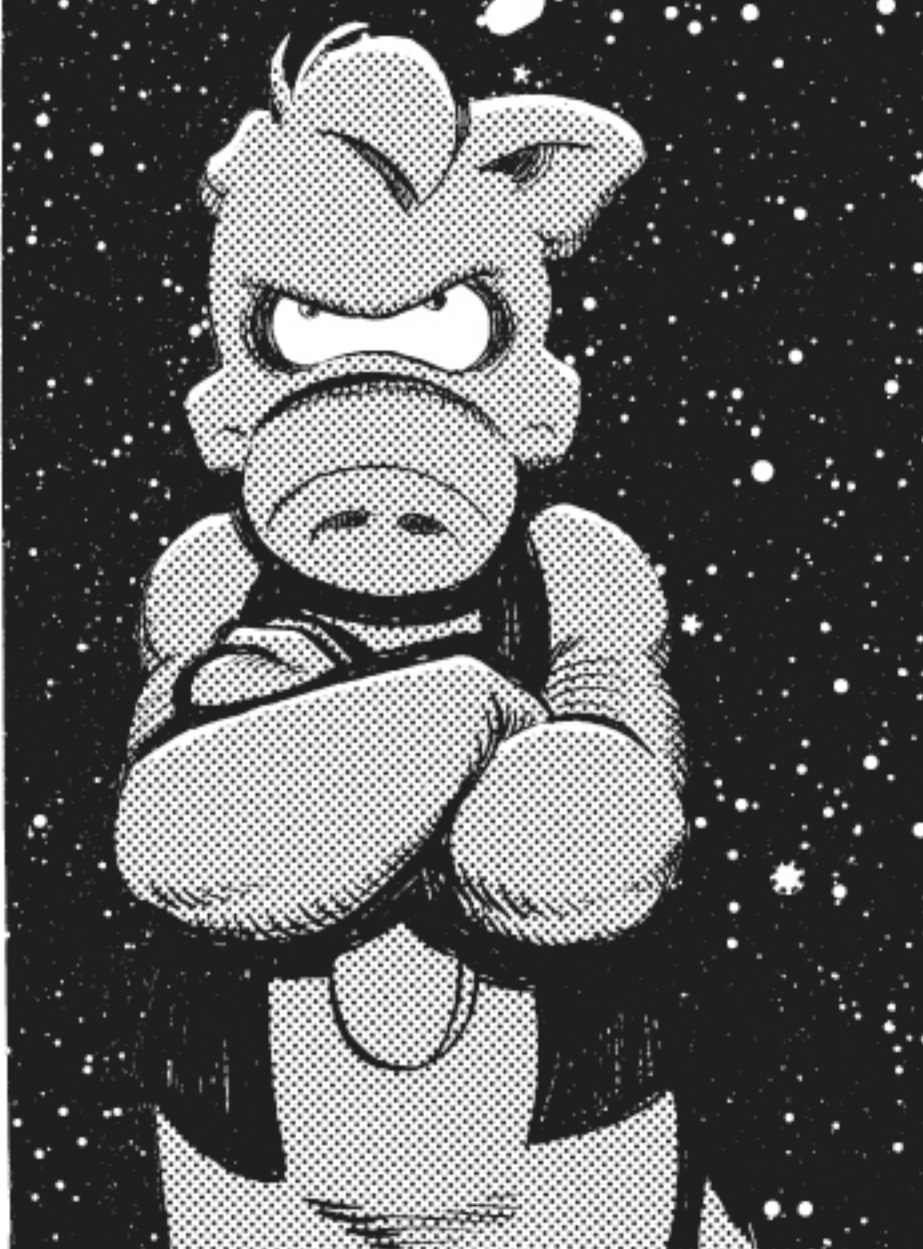
OKAY...

CEREBUS CAN'T THINK
OF THEIR NAMES
JUST THIS MINUTE

BUT!



CEREBUS HASN'T
KILLED AS MANY
PEOPLE AS
SOME
PEOPLE
HAVE...



AND CEREBUS
DOESN'T SHIT
FUCK CUNT
SWEAR AS
MUCH AS SOME
PEOPLE
DO...



OH,
SURE

CEREBUS
TAKES YOUR
NAME IN
VAIN...

BUT!
IF YOU
THINK
ABOUT IT
...





THAT'S A
KIND OF
TRIBUTE.

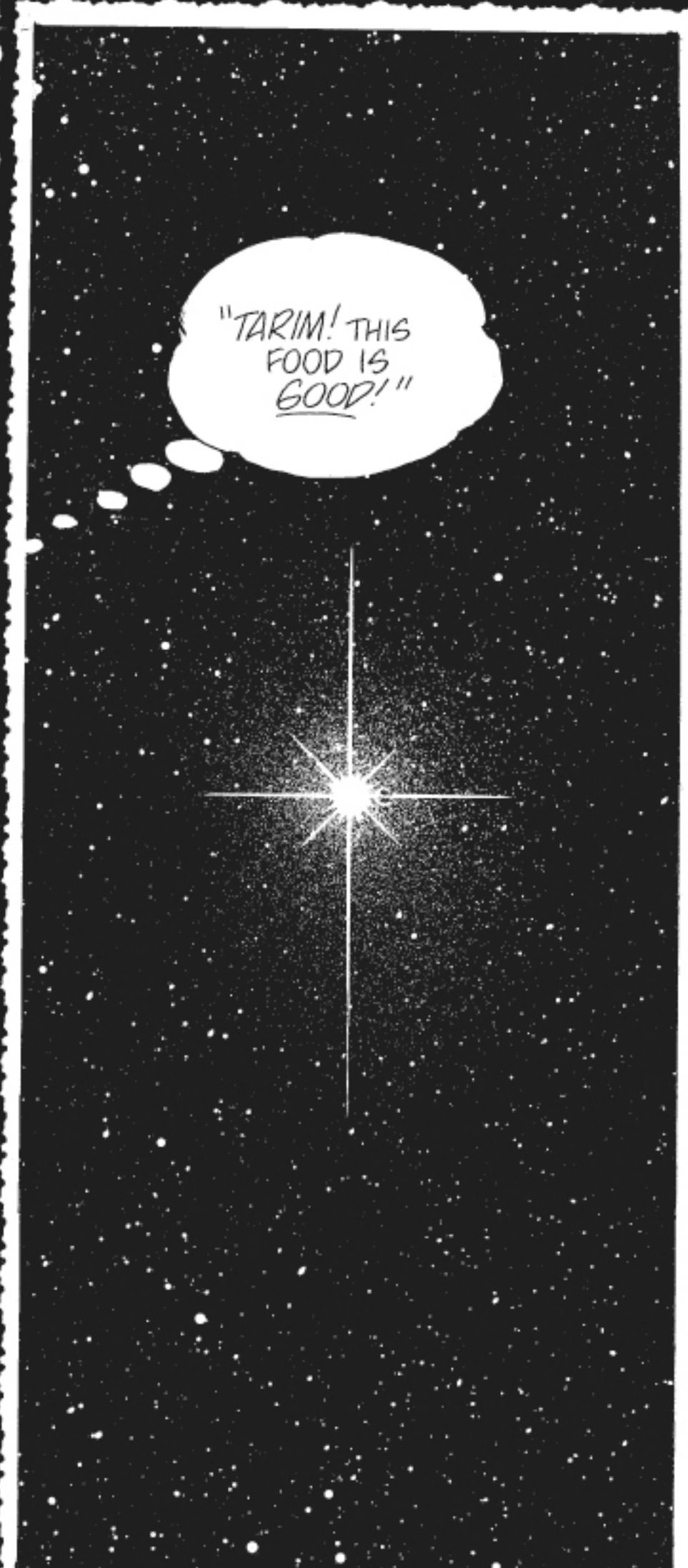
RIGHT?



"TARIM!"

"TARIMTARIM
TARIMTARIM
TARIMTARIM
TARIMTARIM"

(AS
IN)



"TARIM! THIS
FOOD IS
GOOD!"



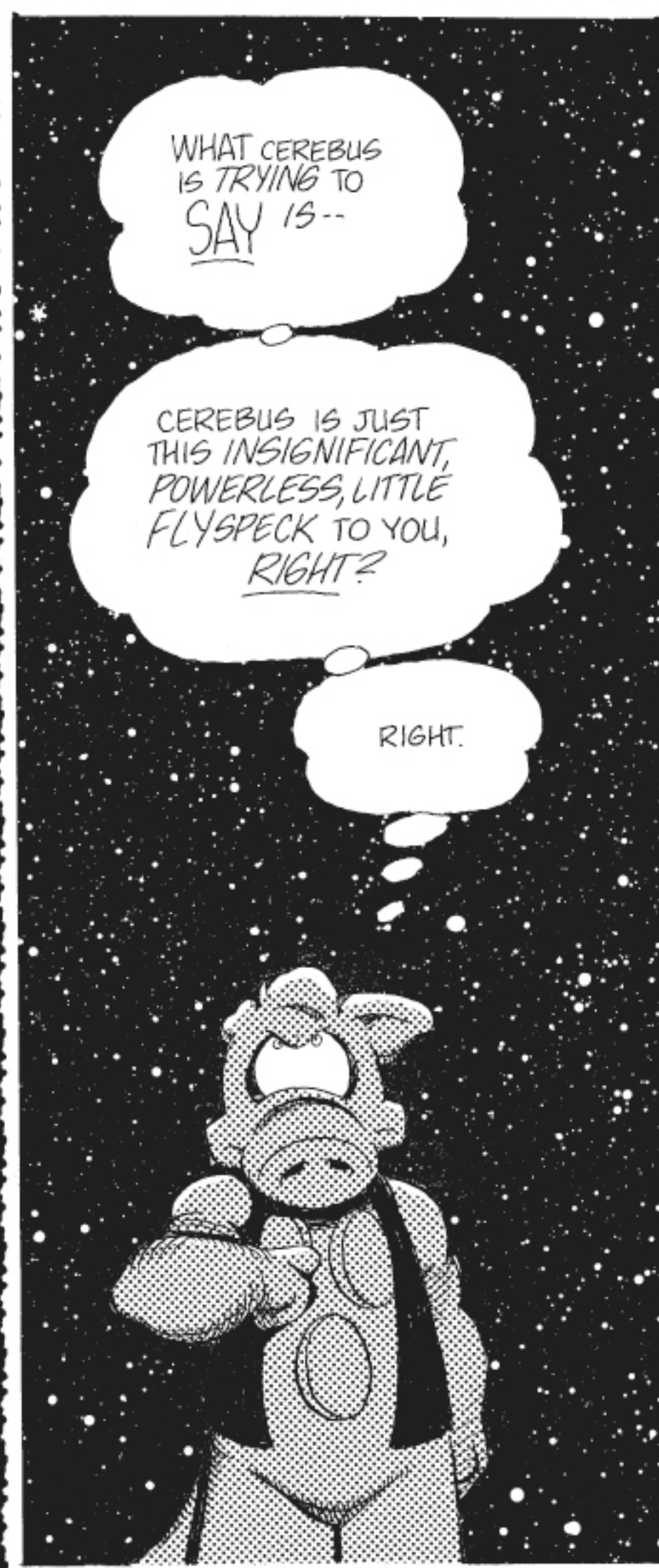
"TARIM! CEREBUS
GOT REALLY
DRUNK LAST
NIGHT!"



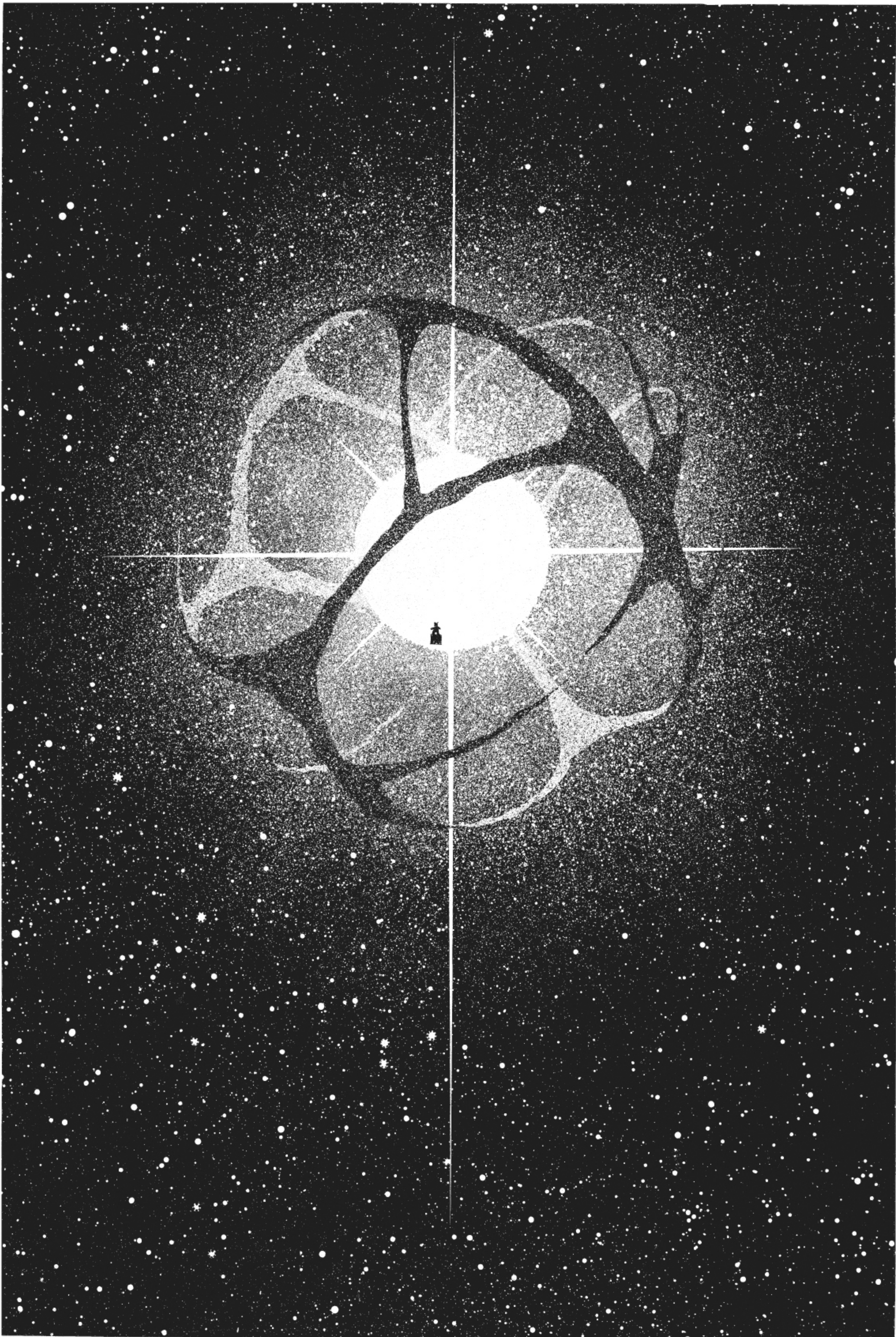
"TARIM! CEREBUS
SURE WOULD LIKE
TO BUGGER A
... "

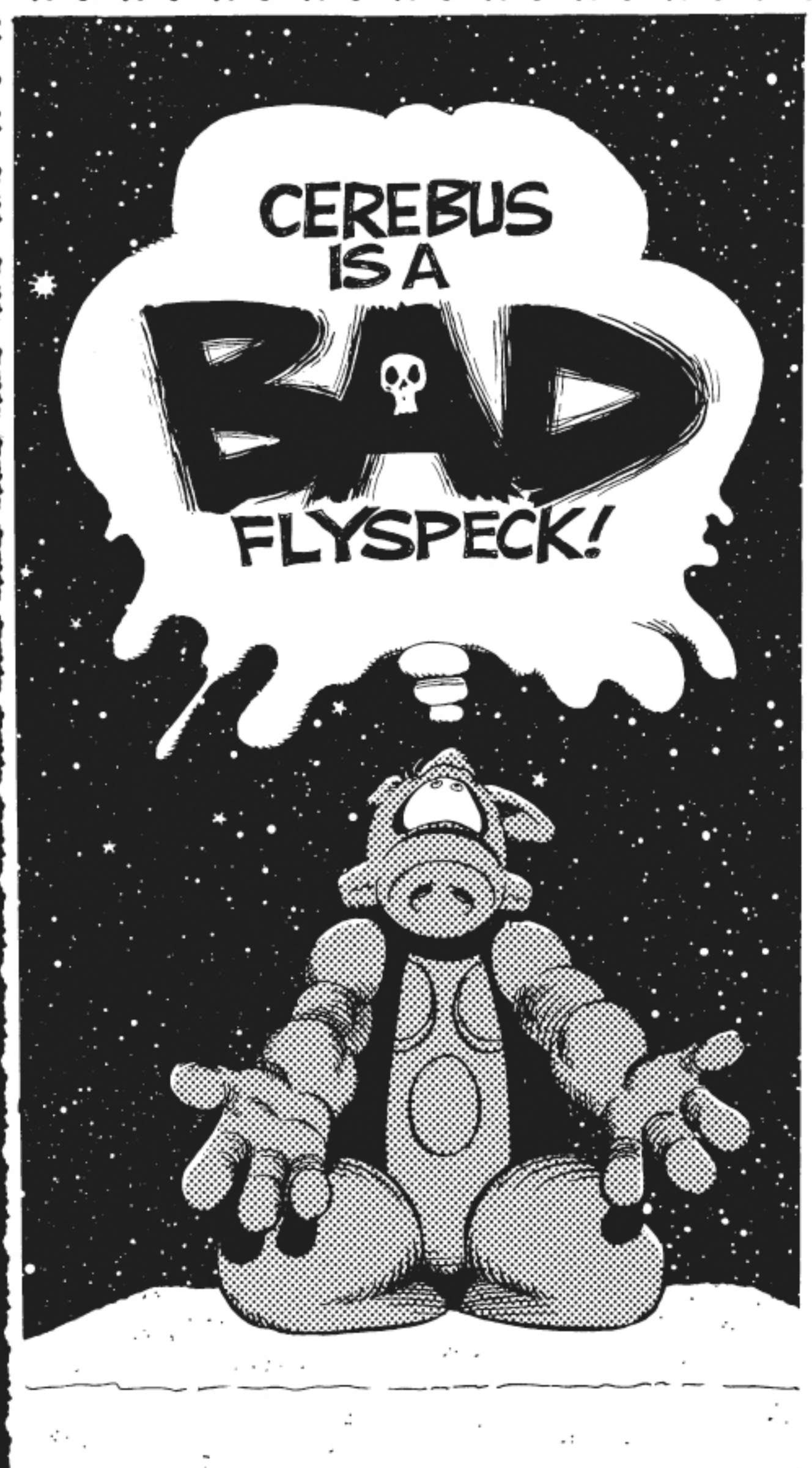
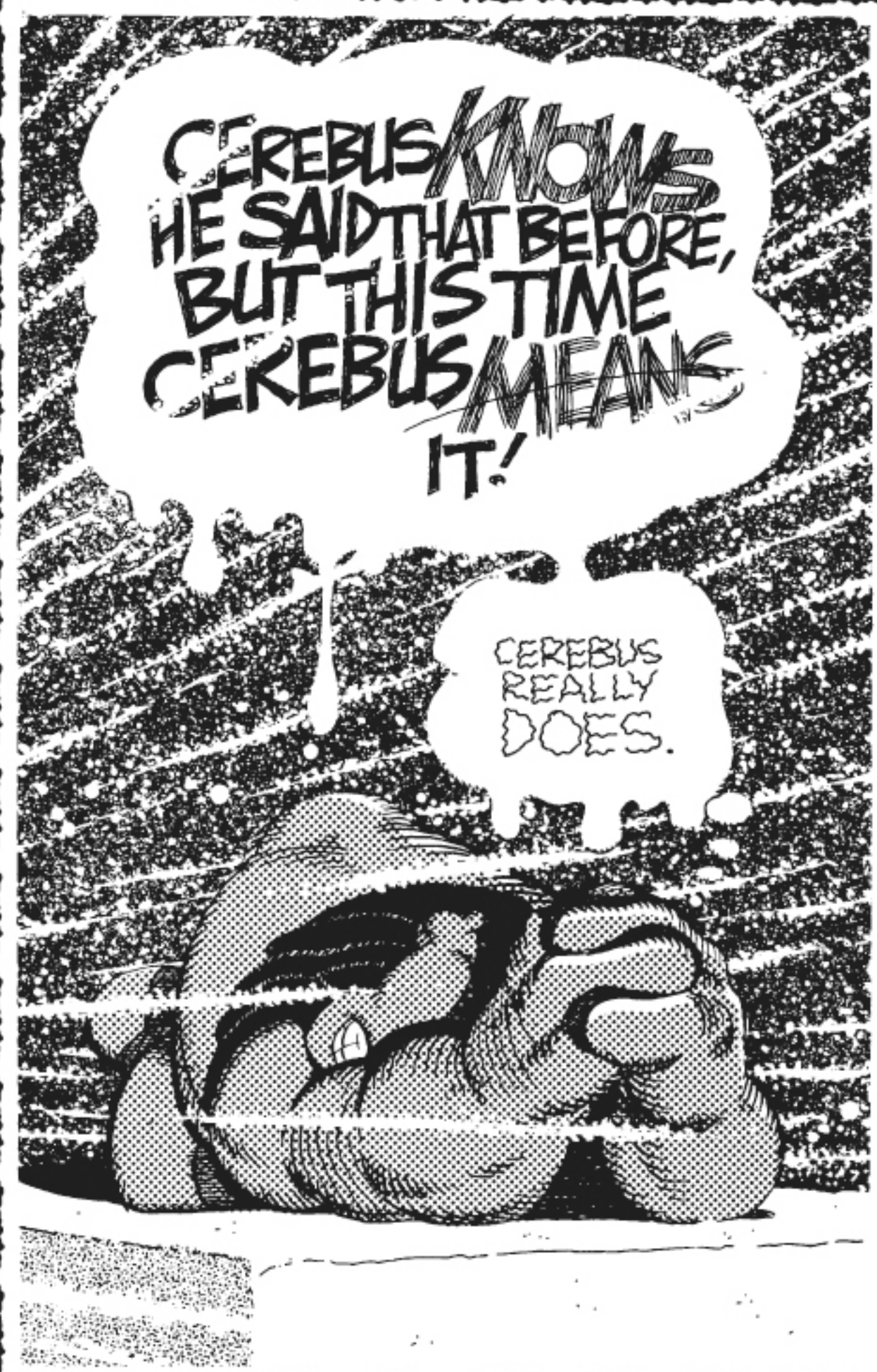


WHAT CEREBUS
IS TRYING TO
SAY IS...

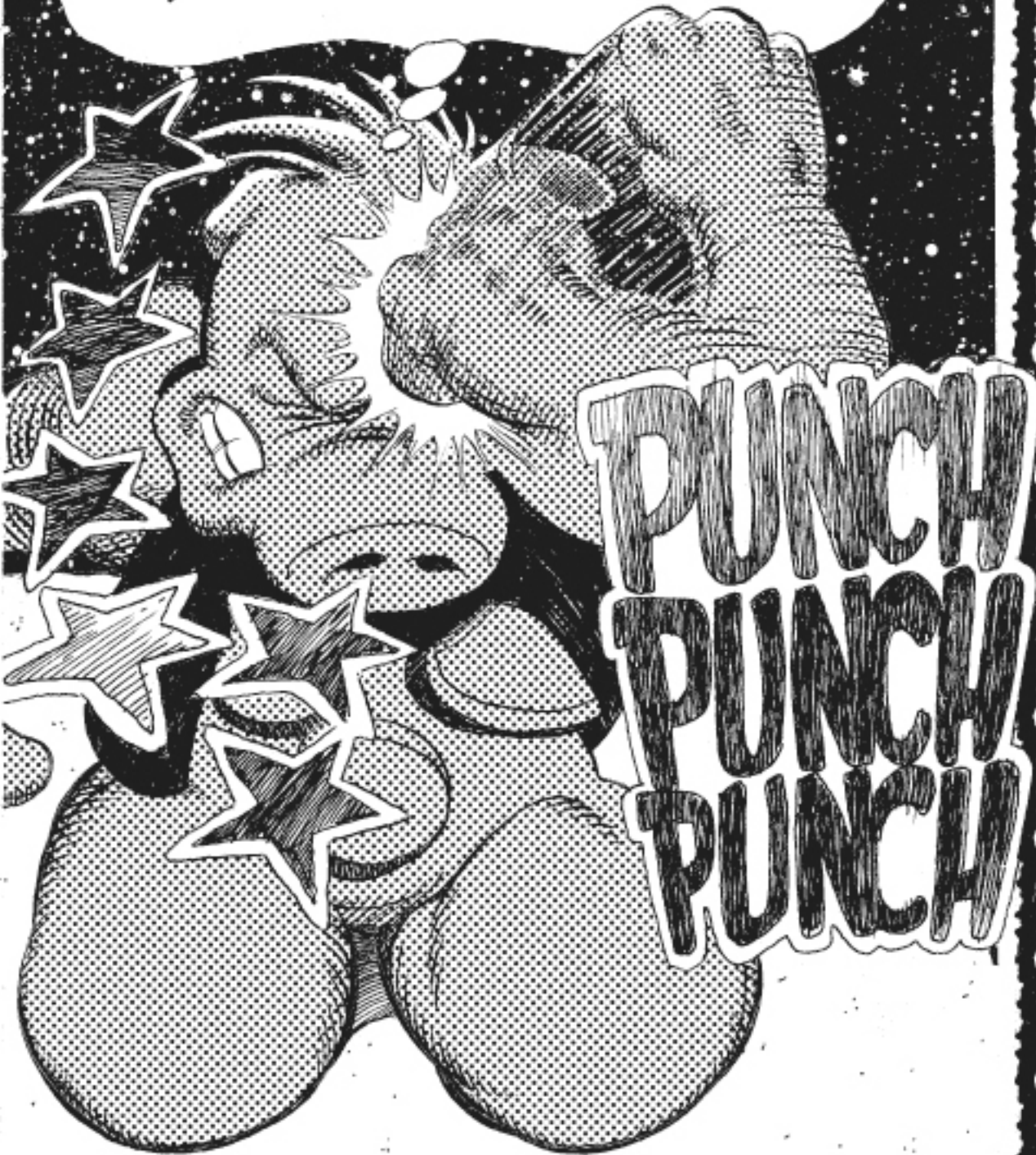








**BAD FLYSPECK!
BAD FLYSPECK!
BAD FLYSPECK!**



(HE'S BUYING IT!
HE'S BUYING IT!
LAY IT ON A
LITTLE THICKER!)

**PLEASE
TARIM!**



**JUST GIVE
CEREBUS
ONE
MORE
CHANCE**

(UNTIL THE
NEXT TIME
CEREBUS
NEEDS "ONE
MORE CHANCE")



**CEREBUS
KNOWS
HE DOESN'T
DESERVE
IT...**

(BUT LOOK AT
HOW PATHETIC
CEREBUS IS--
BEGGING
YOU)

HUNCHED
OVER--
TREMBLING...
PLEADING...



PLEASE

(SNIVELING)

SWIFF

IF YOU'LL
JUST GIVE
CEREBUS
ONE MORE
CHANCE

CEREBUS
WILL BE
YOUR CHOSEN
ONE!



CEREBUS
WILL
CONQUER THE
KNOWN WORLD
IN YOUR NAME!

CEREBUS
WILL
BUILD
MONUMENTS
TO YOUR
GLORY



TOWERING
MONUMENTS THAT
WILL REACH TO THE
SKY

CEREBUS WILL
SLAY YOUR ENEMIES
IN THE THOUSANDS



AND
ROAST
THEIR WOMEN
AND CHILDREN
OVER COOKING
FIRES!



CEREBUS
WILL--

PSST!...





SEE -- THE PROBLEM
WITH YOUR "BAKER
AND BREAD" ANALOGY
IS THAT I'M NOT
THE BAKER AND
YOU'RE NOT THE
BREAD.

YOU'RE THE BAKER
AND YOUR LIFE
IS THE BREAD...

TARIM?

≡SIGH≡ I KNOW YOU MUST
GET TIRED OF HEARING
THIS, BUT-- NO. I'M NOT
TARIM.

I AM YOUR CREATOR -- BUT
GIVEN THAT NO CREATOR
KNOWS WHERE HIS IDEAS
COME FROM, EVEN THAT'S
A SHAKY PREMISE.

MAYBE I'M SOMEONE'S
CREATION AS YOU'RE MY
CREATION ... MAYBE MY
CREATOR HAS NO IDEA
WHERE I CAME FROM.

OR
MAYBE.

MAYBE HE'S
JUST A VOICE
IN MY HEAD.

OF
COURSE

HEARING
VOICES

IS A SIGN
OF INSANITY

THAT'S WHAT
YOU'RE THINKING,
ISN'T IT? INSANITY
OR... OR

**DEMONIC
POSSESSION!**

I CAN MOVE
OUTSIDE YOUR
HEAD.

IF I SUDDENLY HEARD
A VOICE IN MY HEAD
THAT'S WHAT I WOULD
THINK (I THINK):

"I MUST BE
CRAZY"
OR:

"I MUST BE
POSSESSED
BY A DEMON!"

AND THEN
BACK I/V.

I CAN MAKE
YOU FORGET
THINGS--LIKE:
HITTING YOU
IN THE FACE
WITH A
PIE A
MOMENT
AGO. OR
...

I CAN
MAKE YOU
REMEMBER
IT AGAIN

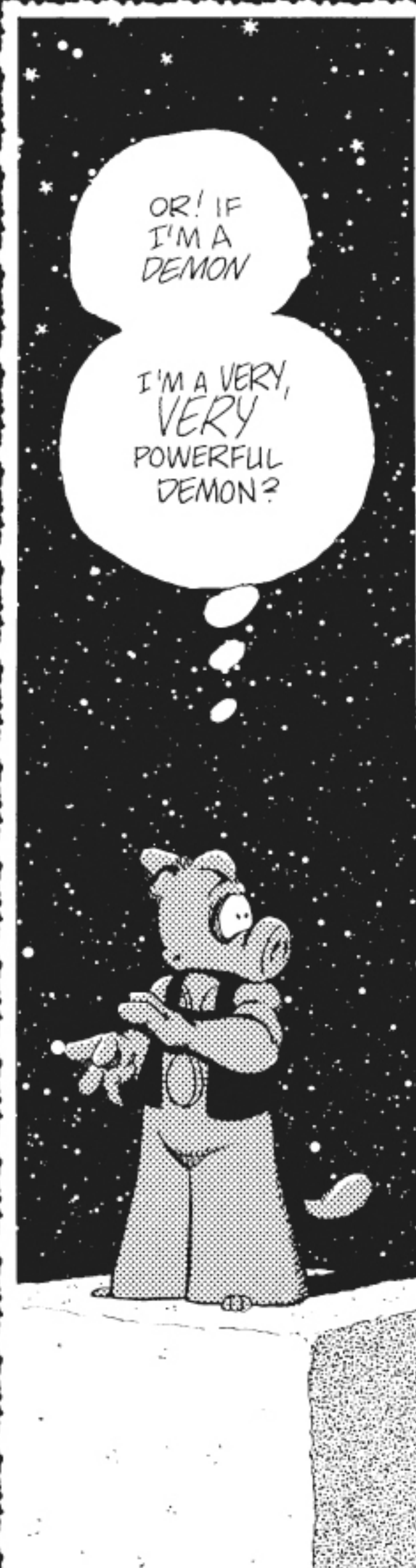
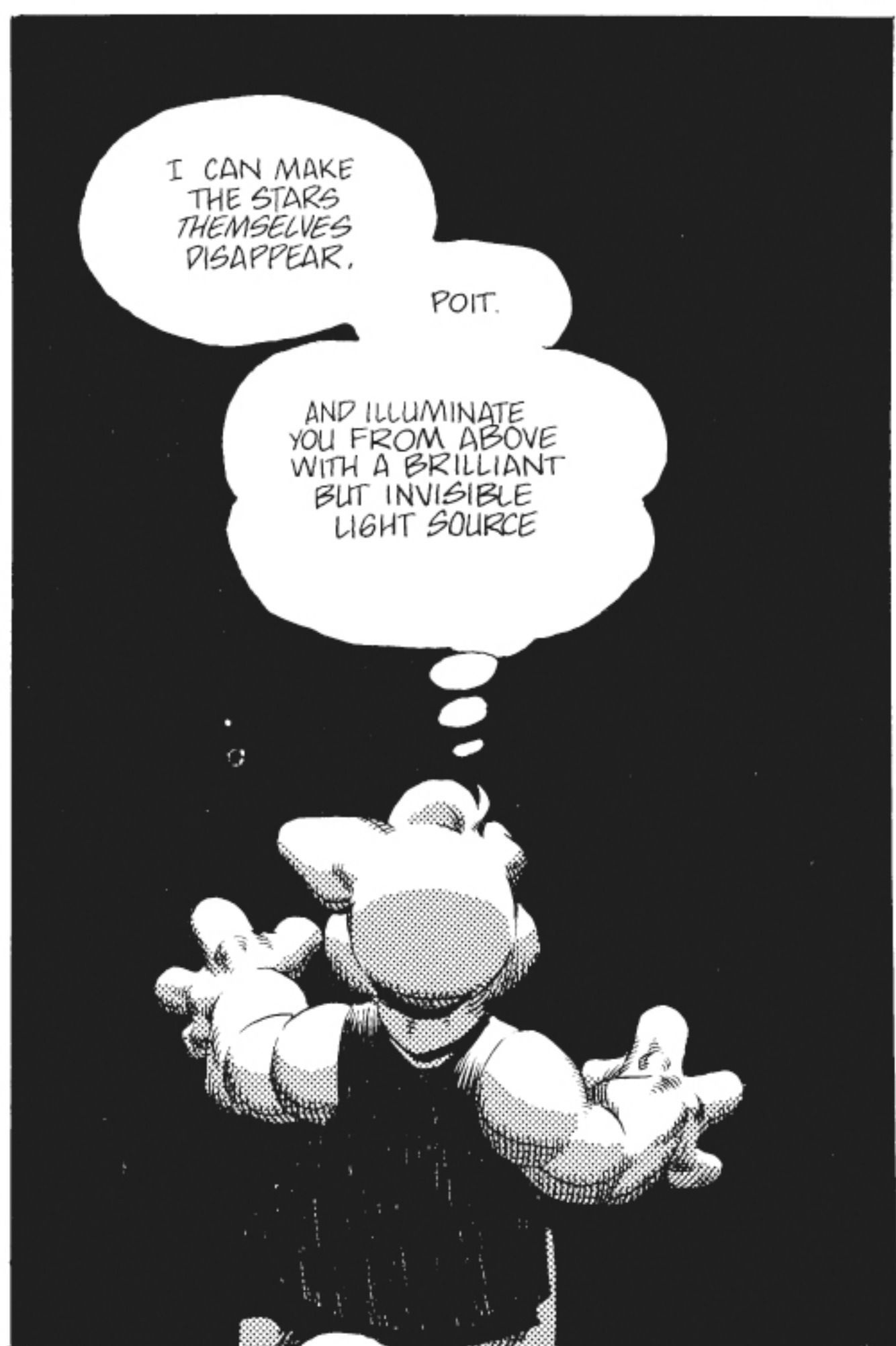
WHERE
DID IT
GO? HOW
COULD
CEREBUS
FORGET?

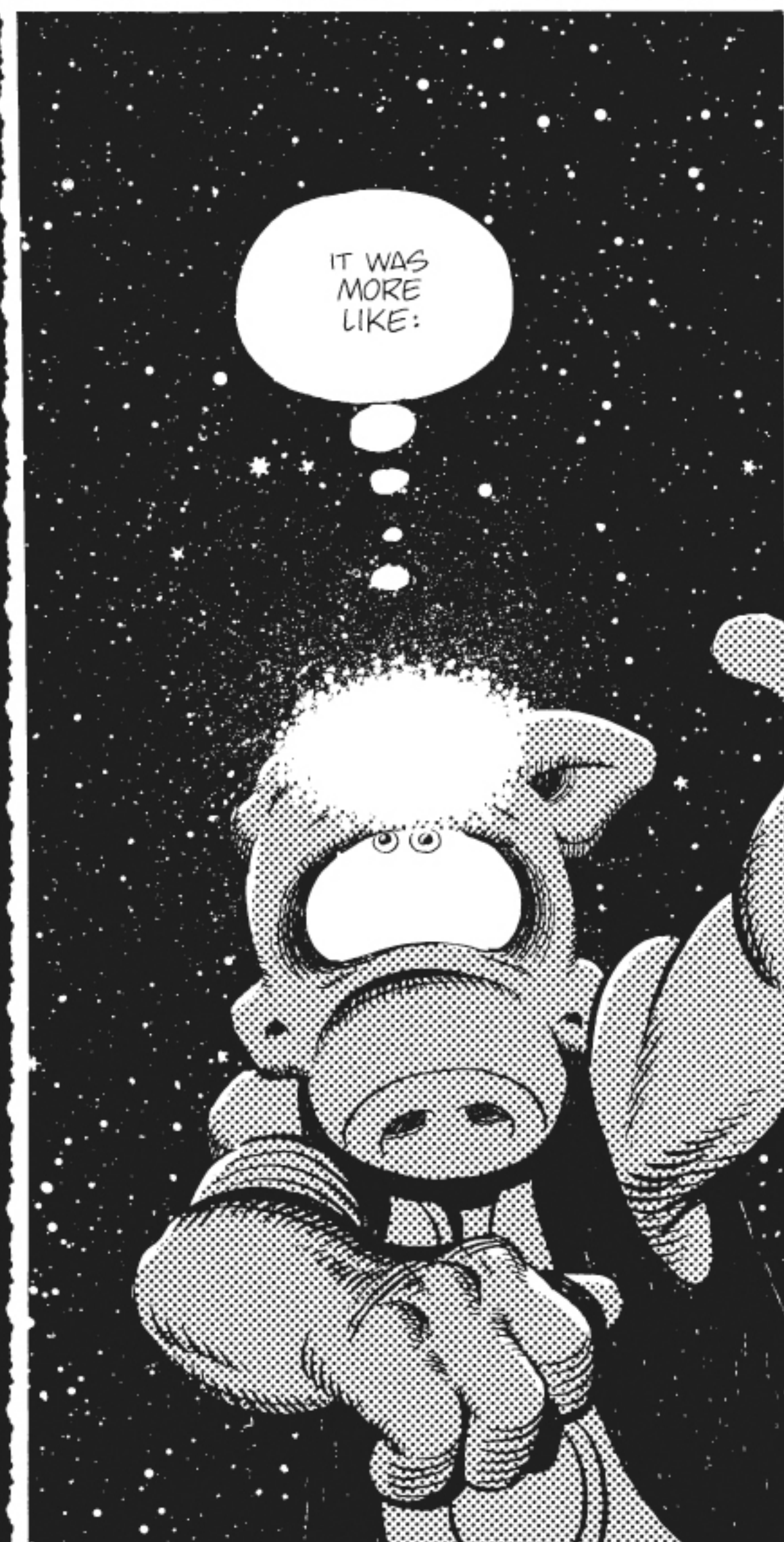
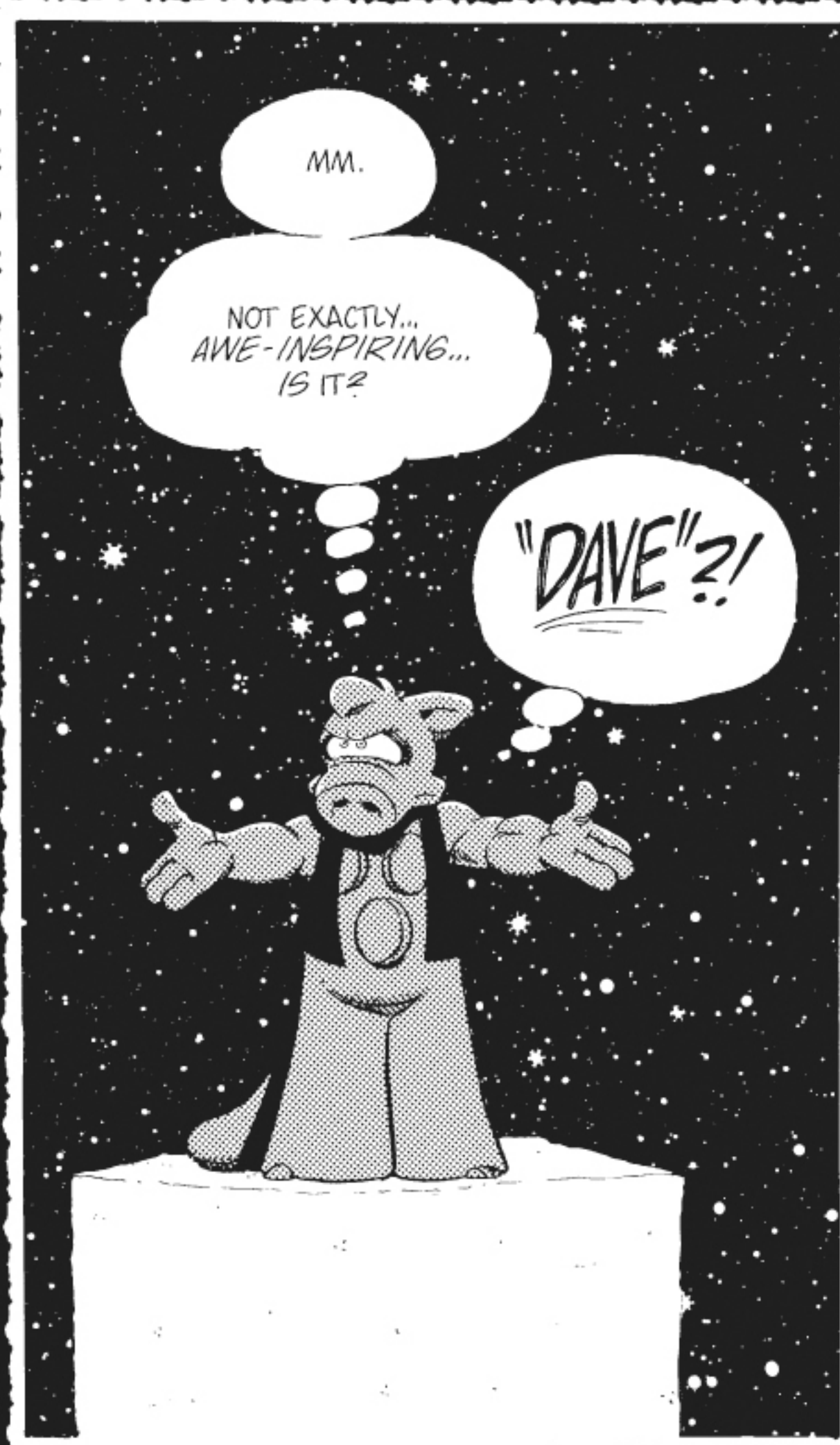
I CAN
MAKE YOU
REMEMBER
IT AS A
BLUEBERRY
PIE...

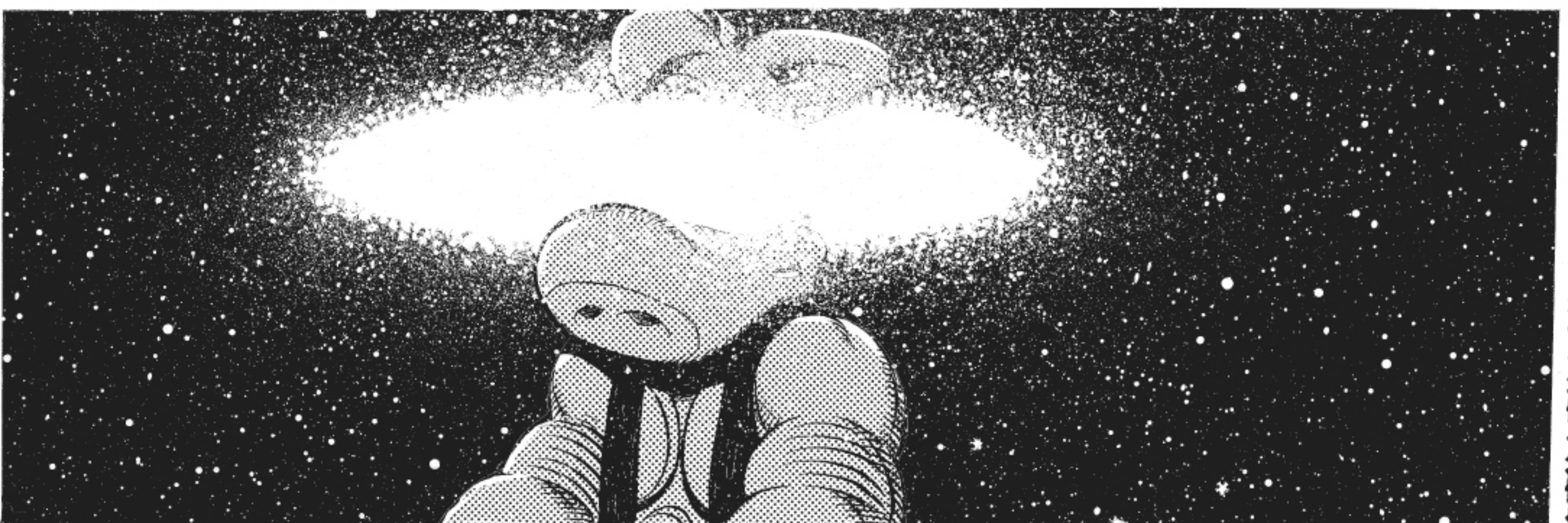
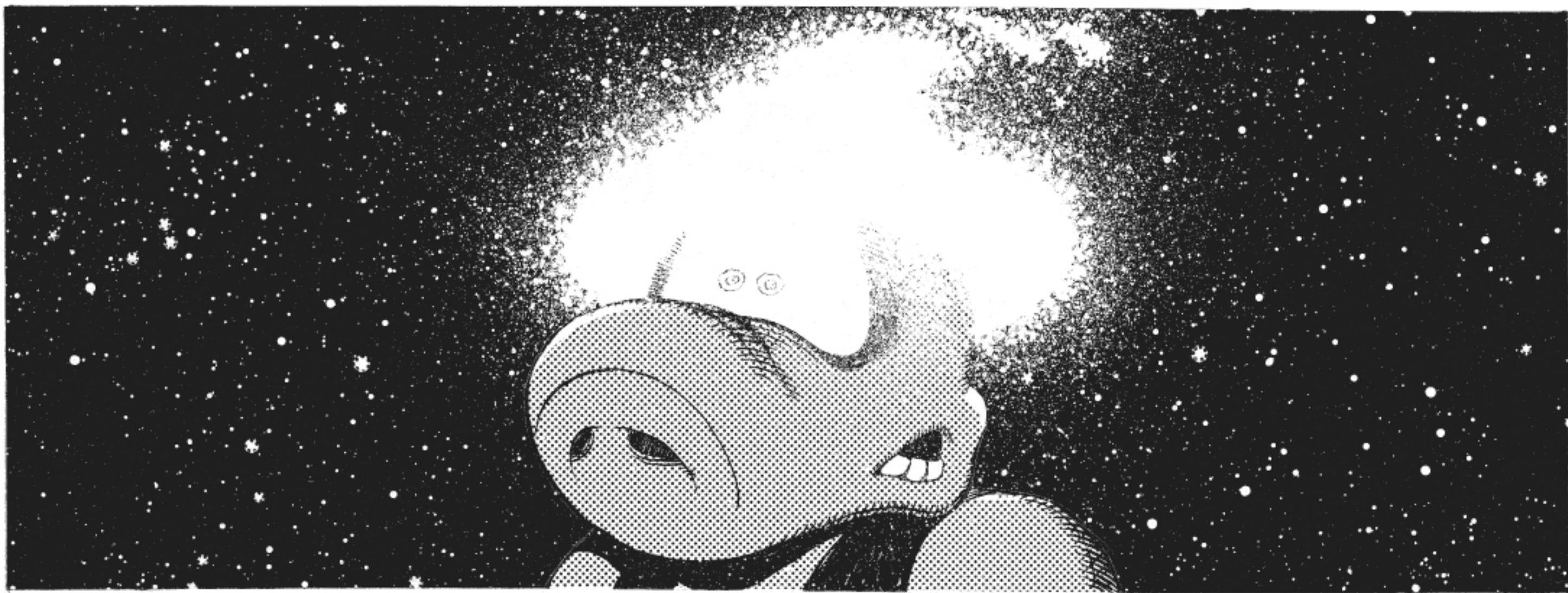
OR
YELLOW
(MATTER)
CUSTARD

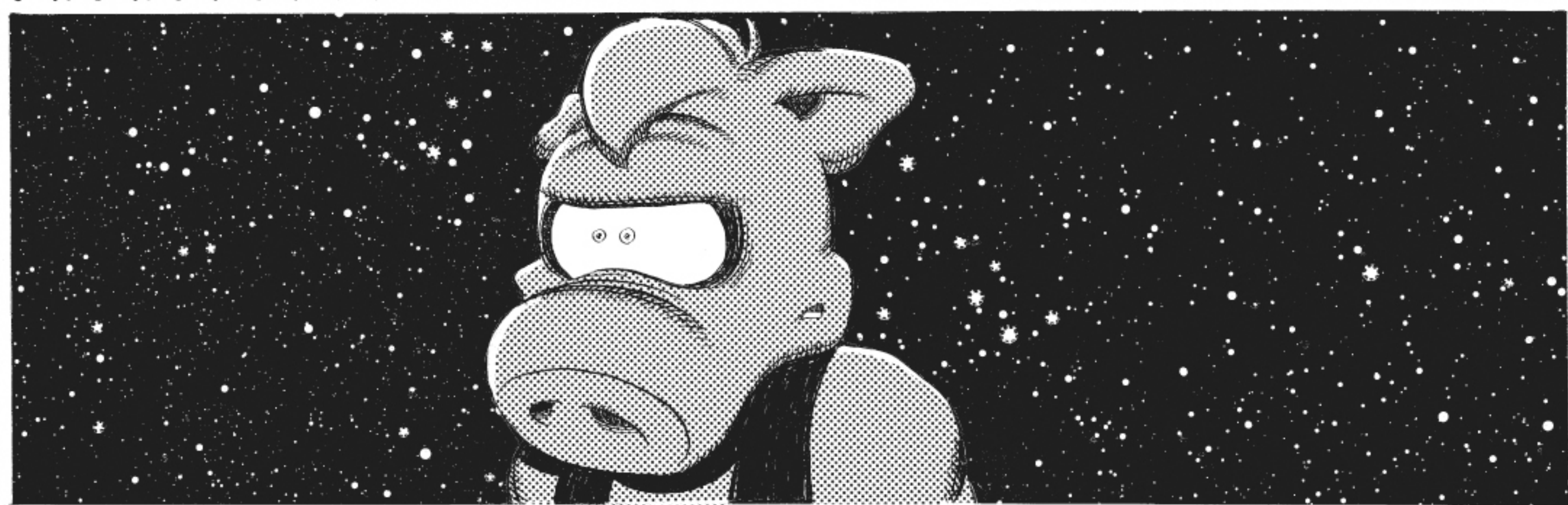
AND THEN
MAKE YOU
FORGET
WHAT IT
WAS THAT
HIT YOU
IN THE
FACE...

LEAVING ONLY
THE MEMORY
THAT I TOLD
YOU WHAT IT
WAS A SECOND
AGO.









NO HEAVENLY CHOIR...
NO SMELL OF BRIMSTONE.
NO SOUND, NO SMELL
WHATSOEVER. SO! WHAT
WAS IT? MY CREATOR?
TARIM? TERIM? GOD?
A DEMON? THE DEVIL?
MY TELEPATHY? SOME-
ONE ELSE'S TELEPATHY?
SPACE ALIENS
MAYBE?

IT HAPPENED
SHORTLY AFTER
YOU MET THE
BUG FOR THE
FIRST TIME.

I KNEW VERY
LITTLE ABOUT YOU
AT THE TIME.
BUT I DID KNOW
YOU WERE AN
HERMAPHRODITE.

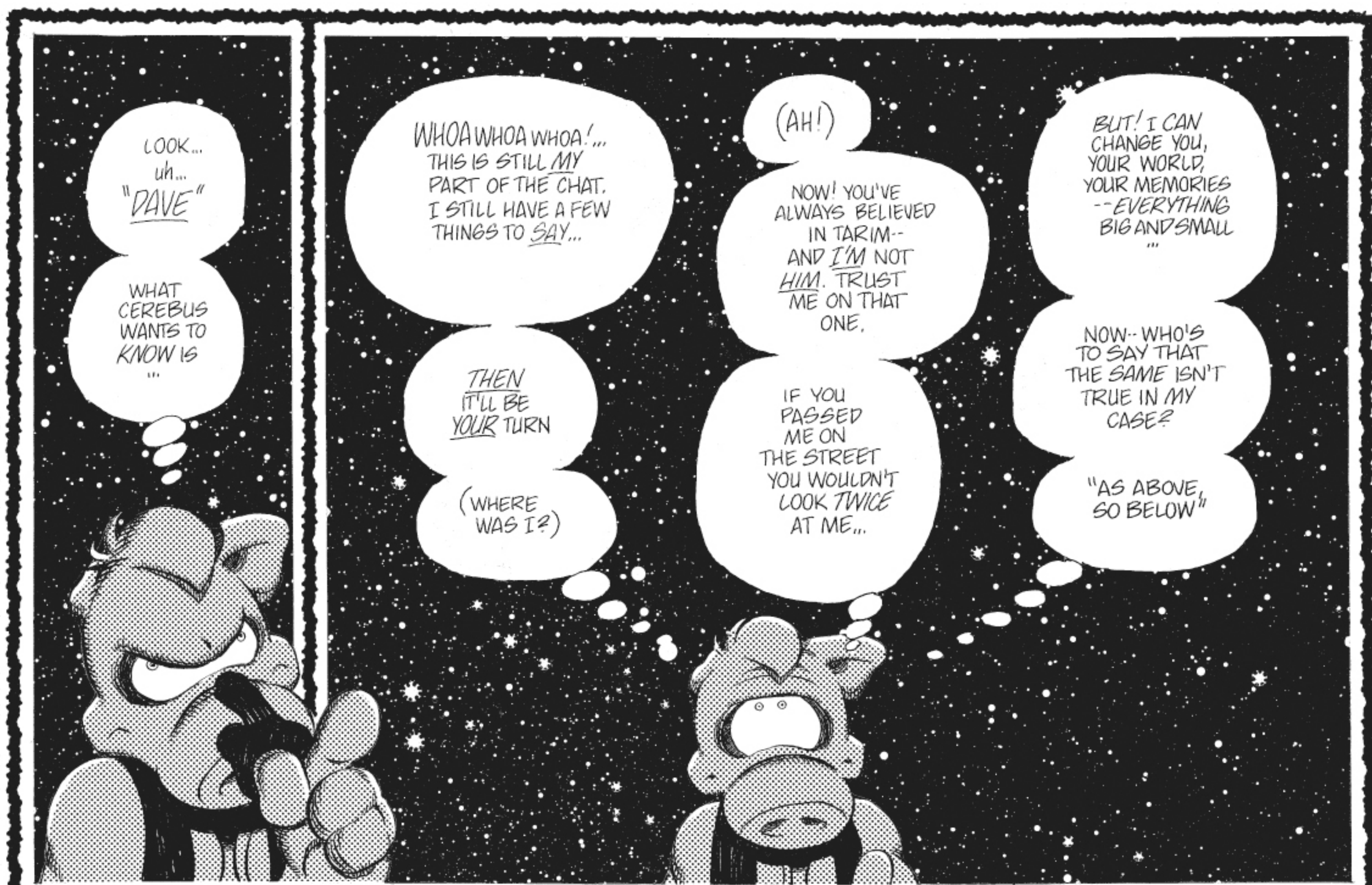
AND I DID
KNOW THAT
YOUR FEMALE
"PLUMBING"
WAS IRREVOCABLY
DAMAGED IN
THE "KITCHEN
KNIFE INCIDENT"

BUT- SUDDENLY- I
FOUND I HAD A LOT
MORE TO SAY.
I KNEW
THAT THE STORY--
YOUR STORY HAD TO
BE LARGE... REALLY
LARGE... REALLY,
REALLY LARGE.

I KNEW THE
SITUATIONS I
WANTED YOU TO
FACE AND I WAS
EAGER TO SEE HOW
YOU WOULD REACT.

AND! I KNEW
THAT SOME DAY
(MANY YEARS LATER)

WE'D HAVE
THIS CHAT...



'STORIA DOESN' LOVE
CER'BUS... NOBUDDY LOVES
CER'BUS... PRIMINNISSER
DOESN' HAVENNY POWER

CER'BUSSES STILL
BROKE... ALL CERBUS
WAN'SISS REAL POWER

NOBUDDY DOES WHUD CER'BUS
TELLZEMADOO NOBUDDY!!
NOBUDDY... CERBUS
JUSSWANNS PEOPLEA
DO WHUDTHER
TOLD!!

'N' GOLD!!
CER'BUSWANSSA
LODRAGOLD!
AMOWNNINNA
GOLD... 'N'
CER'BUSWANSSABE
LEF' ALONE!

'ONLY ONE
PERSON'D
LOVE CER'BUS...

EVVYBUDDY LIEZA
CERBUS... CERBUS
DUZZEN' CARE IF THEY
HADE CER'BUS

JUZZBE HONEST... JUZ
JUZ SAY:
'CER'BUS?
I HADE
YORE
GLUDDS!!'

CER'BUS JUZ
WAN'S PEOPLE
CER'BUS C'N
COUN' ON

NODALLA
ESE
BACK
STABBIN'
TWO-FACED
NO GOOD
DOUBLE
DEALIN'
HIC
ROCKS



AND
uh

SO
ON,

SOPHIA LOVED YOU... SHE
KNEW YOU NEEDED TO
FEEL LOVED, YOU WANTED
LOTS OF SEX AND MOST
OF THE TIME YOU WANTED
TO BE LEFT ALONE

SO SHE
DID ALL
THREE
AS BEST
SHE COULD

AND HER MOTHER,
OF COURSE, HATED
YOUR GUTS AND
WAS AS HONEST
AS SHE COULD
BE ON THE
SUBJECT...



AS POPE, YOU
HAD ABSOLUTE
POWER... YOU TOLD
PEOPLE TO GIVE
YOU GOLD AND
THEY GAVE YOU
A MOUNTAIN
OF IT.

NO ONE
HAD ACCESS
TO YOU.



EXCEPT BEAR
AND BOOBAH.

THE TWO PEOPLE
FROM YOUR DAYS
AS A MERCENARY
THAT YOU COULD
COUNT ON.
ALWAYS.

AYE.
ALWAYS.

BUT!

(OF
COURSE)

CEREBUS
IS TIRED OF
THIS. "I LOVE
YOU," SHE SAYS.

YEAH,
RIGHT.

SO WHY IS IT
CEREBUS WHO ALWAYS
HAS TO GO LOOKING
FOR HER?

SHE DOESN'T
LOVE CEREBUS.
NOBODY LOVES
CEREBUS.

CEREBUS WANTS
TO KILL WEISSHAUPT!
THAT'S WHAT CEREBUS
WANTS TO DO

KILL WEISSHAUPT.
AND... AND GET RID
OF SOPHIA AND
HER STUPID
MOTHER...

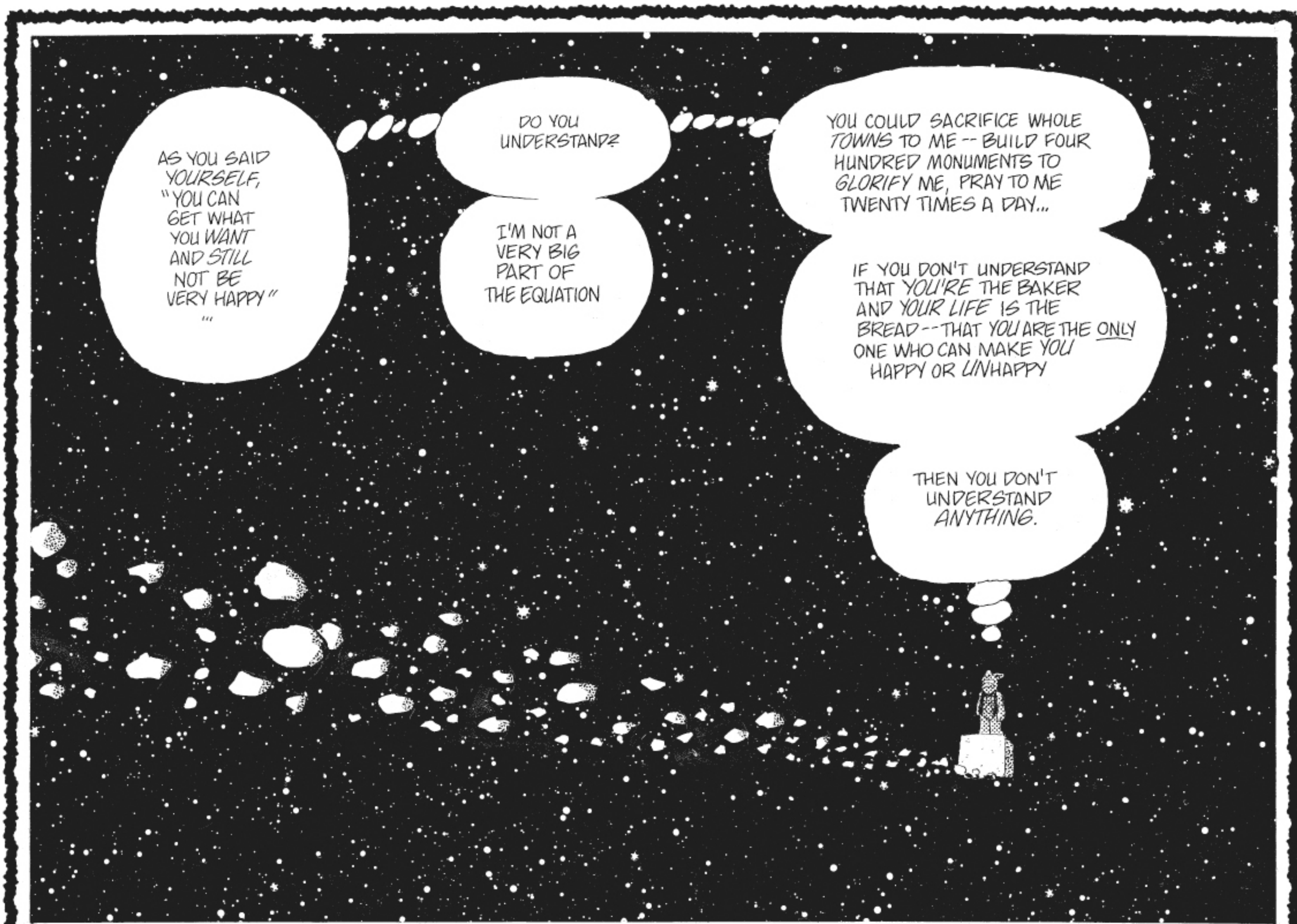
SEND BEAR
OUT TO GET
JAKA! AYE!
JAKA!! SHE
LOVES CEREBUS
...

CEREBUS
JUST HAS TO
FIGURE OUT
A WAY TO
GET RID OF
SOPHIA AND
HER MOTHER

AND THEN
BEAR AND
BOOBAH...

SINCE THEY'RE
PROBABLY
STEALING
CEREBUS'
GOLD...

SMUGGLING
IT OUT WHILE
CEREBUS IS
SLEEPING...

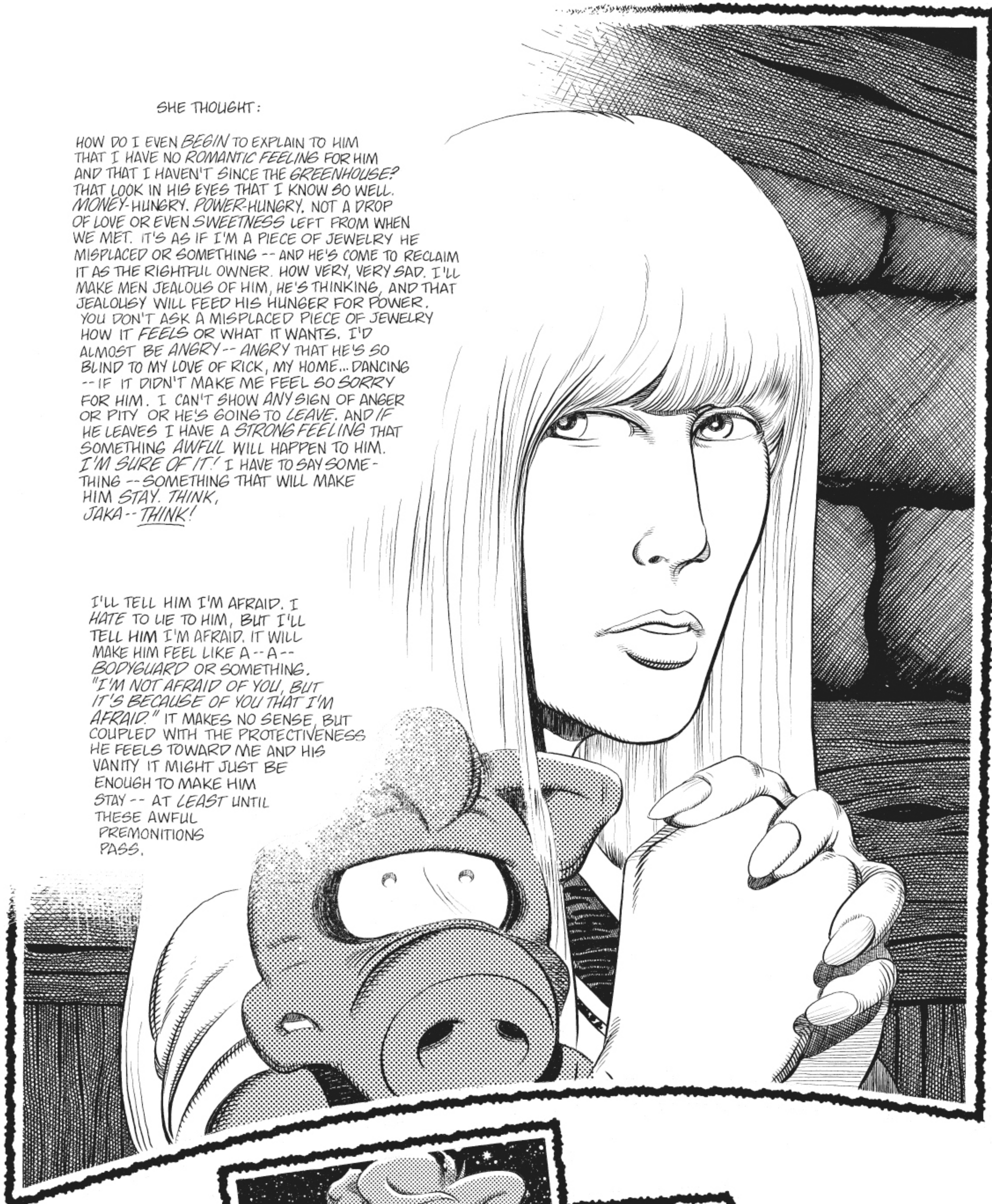




SHE THOUGHT:

HOW DO I EVEN *BEGIN* TO EXPLAIN TO HIM THAT I HAVE NO ROMANTIC FEELING FOR HIM AND THAT I HAVEN'T SINCE THE GREENHOUSE? THAT LOOK IN HIS EYES THAT I KNOW SO WELL. *MONEY-HUNGRY. POWER-HUNGRY.* NOT A DROP OF LOVE OR EVEN *SWEETNESS* LEFT FROM WHEN WE MET. IT'S AS IF I'M A PIECE OF JEWELRY HE MISPLACED OR SOMETHING -- AND HE'S COME TO RECLAIM IT AS THE RIGHTFUL OWNER. HOW VERY, VERY SAD. I'LL MAKE MEN JEALOUS OF HIM, HE'S THINKING, AND THAT JEALOUSY WILL FEED HIS HUNGER FOR POWER. YOU DON'T ASK A MISPLACED PIECE OF JEWELRY HOW IT FEELS OR WHAT IT WANTS. I'D ALMOST BE *ANGRY* -- *ANGRY* THAT HE'S SO BLIND TO MY LOVE OF RICK, MY HOME... DANCING -- IF IT DIDN'T MAKE ME FEEL SO SORRY FOR HIM. I CAN'T SHOW ANY SIGN OF ANGER OR PITY OR HE'S GOING TO LEAVE. AND IF HE LEAVES I HAVE A *STRONG FEELING* THAT SOMETHING *AWFUL* WILL HAPPEN TO HIM. *I'M SURE OF IT!* I HAVE TO SAY SOMETHING -- SOMETHING THAT WILL MAKE HIM *STAY*. THINK, *JAKA* -- *THINK!*

I'LL TELL HIM I'M AFRAID. I HATE TO LIE TO HIM, BUT I'LL TELL HIM I'M AFRAID. IT WILL MAKE HIM FEEL LIKE A -- A -- *BODYGUARD* OR SOMETHING. "I'M NOT AFRAID OF YOU, BUT IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU THAT I'M AFRAID." IT MAKES NO SENSE, BUT COUPLED WITH THE PROTECTIVENESS HE FEELS TOWARD ME AND HIS VANITY IT MIGHT JUST BE ENOUGH TO MAKE HIM *STAY* -- AT LEAST UNTIL THESE *AWFUL PREMONITIONS* PASS.



I DIDN'T
KILL JAKA,
CEREBUS
...

JAKA
IS ALIVE.

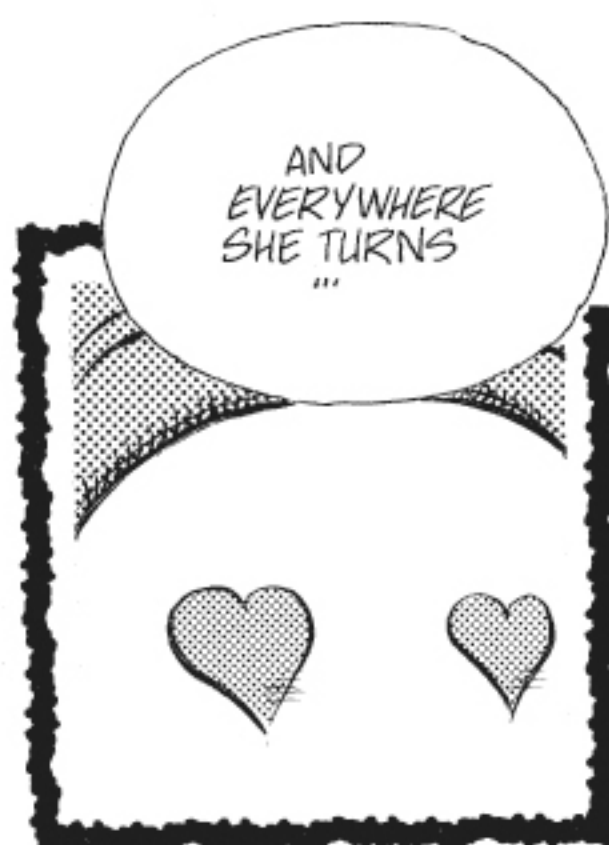
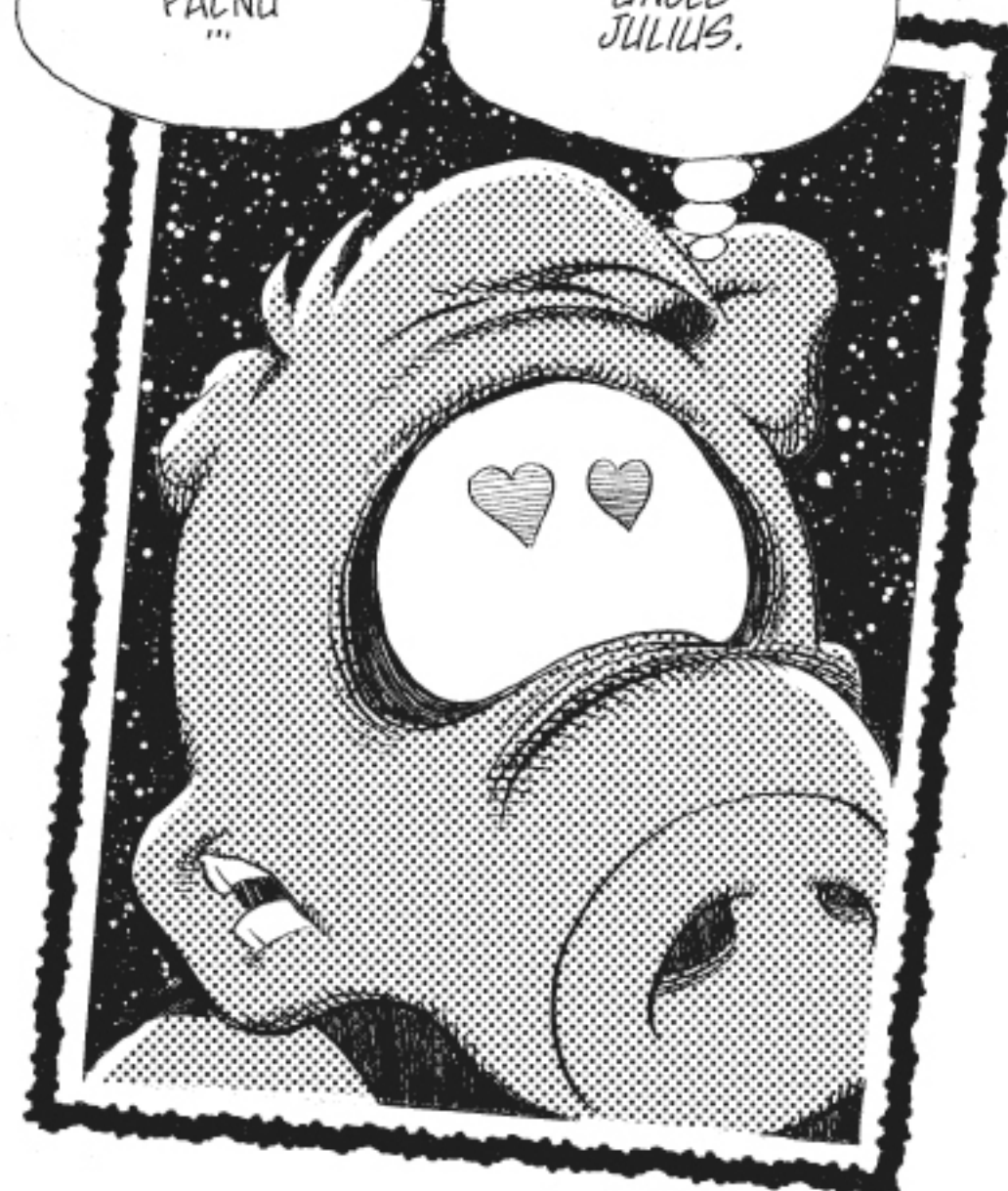


HER
MARRIAGE
IS OVER.



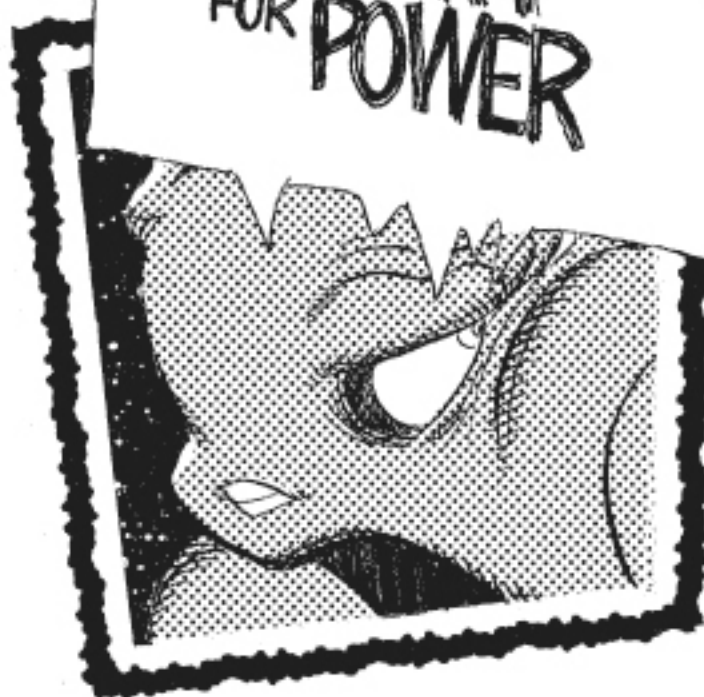
SHE'S
BACK IN
PALNU
...

WITH HER
UNCLE
JULIUS.

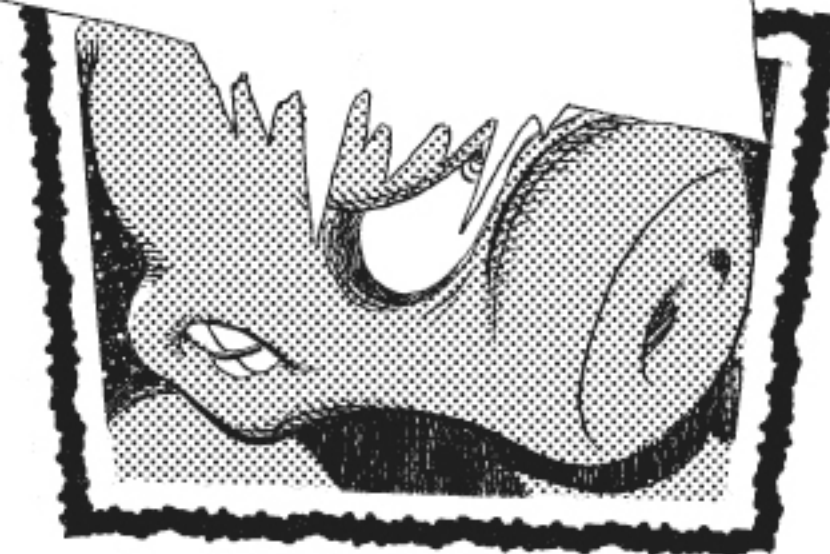


AND
EVERYWHERE
SHE TURNS
...

SHE FEELS HERSELF
DEVoured
BY THE EYES OF MEN
HUNGRY
FOR WEALTH,
HUNGRY
FOR POWER



AND WHEN SHE
SEES THAT LOOK OF
TRANSPARENT
AVARICE--THAT
ARROGANT, SICK
NEED TO POSSESS
HER--TO OWN HER--TO
CONTROL
HER...



SHE
THINKS
OF YOU
...

AND A
HUNDRED
OTHERS
JUST LIKE
YOU.



A FEW
MONTHS
AGO...

...
SHE DECIDED
TO HAVE HER
PORTRAIT
PAINTED...



You see before you, gentle lady, the fruits of my labours as Chairman of the Palnan Arts Council. Every well-regarded painter in the land displayed in descending order of popularity. Of these none is more universally heralded than...

This is all of them, then?

Mm... Yes. Of course, these are merely studies and cartoons which anticipate the finished work. Any detail or colour scheme which fails to please you can be changed or...

They're all a bit... much, don't you think? I mean, I've never worn a suit of armour in my life, and as for the ceremonial robes and capes... it's all I can do to make it through an investiture that lasts an hour. I'm scarcely interested in reminding myself of that when I'm eating my morning grapefruit.

Ah. Ah. Yes. I see. Well, as I said, anything which doesn't please you can be changed. You're looking for something less... formal then.

Formal, I could live with. All of these seem bent on... I don't know... deification? And you're sure this is all of them?

Mmm... yes. Yes, indeed. Perhaps we could discuss which of these you might most...

The reason I ask is that one of my maids told me that you had a picture submitted which you considered... unsuitable. You had a short chat with her when you arrived for our second appointment.

I'm very sorry. That was indiscreet of me.

Not at all. Not at all. Cynthia is a wonderful... conversationalist.

Ah. You are most gracious, gentle lady, but, still, I humbly apologize.

I'd like to see it, please. The unsuitable picture.

Ah. I... believe it has already been returned to the artist.

You are very sweet to be concerned about my feelings, but, like any honest man, you haven't the capacity to sustain an untruth. I am very flattered and grateful for your concern, but I'm afraid I must insist. As you are a gentleman, I am relying on you not to put me in the awkward position of having to do so more than once. Please.

As you wish, gentle lady. I have the... "picture" is too flattering a word... the "thing" right over this way in my office. In fact, I retained the picture for exactly the reason that I felt some comment was required when I returned it. And then I thought that even a rebuke from someone in my position might grant the... "thing" a dignity to which it was not entitled. If you wish me to alert the appropriate authorities, I can do so at once. In fact, I should probably have done so when I first laid eyes upon it. So. Now that the wretched thing has been...

No, no. Don't cover it up again. I want to look at it.

As you wish, gentle lady. The man is obviously no better than a... beast. Insulting you, desecrating our flag. I can assure you that everyone associated with this incident within the Council will be... Ah! Ah, yes. Exactly my reaction. It is laughable. A beast, yes. But no threat to you, is it? No. A capering monkey of a thing. Ridiculous in its...

This one. This is the painter I want.

But, gentle lady... he's... well, he's not even a painter. He's... he's...

Have all the other works returned along with a cheque for twenty-five crowns and my compliments. And ask the artist... has he signed it? Ah, he has... have Mr. Zulli arrange an appointment in my suite for the day after tomorrow. Mid-evening.

Gentle lady, I must respectfully point out... in my capacity as the Chairman of...

Thank you so much. I really must return to my rooms now and write you a letter of recommendation. You've been helpful. Wonderfully helpful. Bonjour, Mr. Chairman.



You understand my situation.

I have a speculative nature. It posed no great difficulty.

I hope I won't offend you by saying that the imagery is not precisely what I was looking for. Remarkable as it is, I would have to judge it as self-pitying. I am, after all, here of my own free will. Do you understand?

Completely, my lady. Do you wish me to do some different sketches?

Is it possible for us just to discuss it?

You have my undivided attention.

What I liked about it was the portrayal of isolation and tension. But it seems to imply a tension between myself and the State which, for me, is not the larger issue. There is confinement, but this too is not the larger issue upon which your wonderful picture... speculates. I move about quite freely and (her gesture was diffidently inclusive of her living quarters) luxury itself is hardly cause for anxiety. But one feels oneself being devoured nonetheless. And not just by those with malicious intent; the effect is the same... if not greater... in the company of well-wishers. One exists on a summit of perception, surrounded by summits of lesser perception (she smiled), or more accurately: summits which are popularly perceived to be lesser. I lack no empathy with this. I remember how it was when Uncle Julius married. It seemed, for a time, as if his wife...

...had inhaled all of Palnu's air and everyone else was gasping for breath.

Thank you. The mistake is in thinking that the condition can be alleviated by the withdrawal of one's physical presence.

To remove yourself completely is to feed the hunger beyond the gilded bars until it becomes insatiable.

(she smiled at this) You're making this very easy for me. Of course, there is one... and only one... with whom this isn't the case.

Lord Julius.

And there, there the problem is one of interposing myself. I can go and see him whenever I want. He always makes time for me. But each moment that passes in his company makes me feel as if I am single-handedly holding weighty affairs of state from his attentions. I feel as if I'm a dam holding back a river... a... a...

...a distraction. A frivolous distraction.

Yes. And that's unbearable.

So you wait for him to summon you. Which he hardly ever does.

Which he never does. (remarkably, this was said without a note of bitterness)

Which he never does (the artist managed to restrain any note of surprise). Do you wish him to see the picture? (this was conversational, but direct, and caught her by surprise)

I... I'm not sure. (she sought safer ground) I know I don't want it publicly displayed. I want it to be...

Yes, yes. A personal thing (on the surface of it he was impertinent, but she was shying away from the larger issue, and here their respective roles in society did not apply). I knew that before I came here (a measured rap to her aristocratic knuckles; in spite of herself she bristled and was secretly relieved when it had no effect upon him. To him, "here" was the leading edge of the discussion, not the luxurious confines of her suite. She misconstrued this as bravery and, as the effect this created served his purpose, he made no effort at clarification). Do you wish me to make a picture of the situation which exists between the two of you or do you wish me to make a picture of your situation relative to him?

(she pondered this for several minutes; she now understood the question but it required probing more deeply within herself than she had thought would be necessary. He was relieved that doing so came naturally to her. She accepted the necessity for an answer without entering into the needless digression of inquiring into the motive behind the question as he half expected she would — the ruler was still poised over her knuckles but she was unaware of this)

I'd like it to be a picture that, if he ever came here... here to my rooms (unconsciously she had connected with his own previous distinction and had rejoined him at the leading edge of the discussion)... the picture might make him understand. (she looked at him, wondering if this was sufficient; he nodded and they were past the crisis point) May I ask you a question?

(the rap on the knuckles had obviously been too sharp; his voice reflected an aristocratic mingling of guilt and pleasure at the reversal of their roles)
Certainly, my lady. What is it that you wish to know?

Two questions, really (at this assertion their roles had retreated to a more appropriate balance and they had both relaxed).

Why is it you aren't taking notes?

Why is it that you don't want me to do further sketches? (at this they both smiled. Their shared purpose was now actual, the dance nearly concluded. He anticipated the final step and could afford the largesse of submission) And the other question?

Why is it that you want this commission? (her gaze was level and he felt her warmth retreating from him. She lived surrounded by sycophants and brigands, rogues and scoundrels. Her sensory apparatus quivered delicately. The smallest untruth or distortion would not go undetected)

I'm a commercial illustrator by trade. Doubtless, out of some perverse sensibility beyond my reckoning, Tarim saw fit to endow me with artistic aptitudes but has coupled these with an instinct for seeing a picture through the eyes of the inartistic — an ability to render the image in precisely the way they would do so themselves had they the skill. For many years, I have derived the greatest satisfaction from pleasing both them and myself — walking the tightrope between my patrons and my Muse. Some time ago I did the covers for a series of... reads (as enunciated by him, the word fairly dripped poison)
— by a man named Victor Reid...

I've never heard of him.

You may count yourself blessed on that score, my lady. Anyway, the royalties have made me wealthy. And the wealth severed the tightrope. I had my choice of any commercial assignment I desired and that, in itself, killed all of my desire for commercial assignments.

And now you sense the hunger growing beyond your own gilded bars. (the leading edge of the discussion hurtled forward, both their scalps now tingling, their spirits buoyant)

Precisely. Now I wish only to do pictures which are intended to satisfy myself. Paintings. Not the engravings with which I have earned my livelihood. When I learned of the competition for your commission, I knew that I had found, in one, the perfect closure to my past life and the door to my future.

(she laughed delightedly as the leading edge of the discussion leapfrogged past her) So I will get a study of the painting, after all?

(suddenly he had the largest respect and admiration for her. She had transcended all of his expectations and his soul seemed to soar within his breast) Yes. You'll have the engraving in a week's time. (he now prepared the stair-step to white radiance)
I'd like to have it back when I deliver the finished work.

That goes without saying. (now she felt his warmth retreat from her. The moment was lost) I'm sorry, you're right (this was insufficient and she knew it) "I would consider it the only equitable basis for this transaction" (this was an aristocratic recitation and the foul taste in her mouth was instantaneous). We are ugly, aren't we? (the unintended meaning dragged him into the muck with her) Patrons, I mean. (the qualification reinforced the faux pas — she stood revealed to herself) I won't ask you to name your price, anyway. I know better than that, at least.

That is an awareness I have never encountered before and it pleases me more than I could ever express. Thank you. (she searched his eyes for any trace of irony and saw only sincerity. Radiance returned and he chose his moment to feed it) Perhaps you'd like to show me what clothes you want to be wearing in the picture.

(her eyes gleamed like those of a child unwrapping a longed-for gift) I didn't know how to ask. It seemed presumptuous... just to assume... assume that I could...

(the radiance between them grew and he smiled through it)
But you had them picked out. Just in case.

(she blushed at this) Yes. Just in case. Did you know all along? (the obscurity of the question was intended to puncture his impenetrable self-assurance by forcing his own inquiry)

That I would get the commission? (his self-assurance thus reinforced, she was compelled merely to nod and smile) I knew that if you saw the study, no other outcome was possible.

Coming from anyone else (she teased), that would sound egotistical.

(he lost no time in reflection) Thank you.

I'll get changed and be right back. (she tugged a long, silken chord) Tell the butler I'd like a glass of wine and have him bring you whatever you want to drink or eat.







In the weeks consumed by the completion of the painting, no further word regarding payment had passed between them. At last, the painter removed the engraving from its resting place on the wallpaper (of his own design) and replaced it with the finished work. He and Jaka shared a bottle of vintage red wine and sat in two armchairs facing L'Enchantement (for so he had christened it).



They sat, for the most part, in silent and separate reverie, conversing only sporadically and then lapsing into silence once more. They parted company that night, patron and artist, with a formality that was not without human warmth. They knew they would never see each other again.



A package arrived at his studio the next day which contained a small chest of solid gold, intricately carved and inlaid with precious stones. Within the box, resting on the finest purple velvet, was an eggshell adorned with a pastel flourish, painstakingly rendered in imitation of the wallpaper design which framed his picture, unmistakably rendered in an amateur's hand.



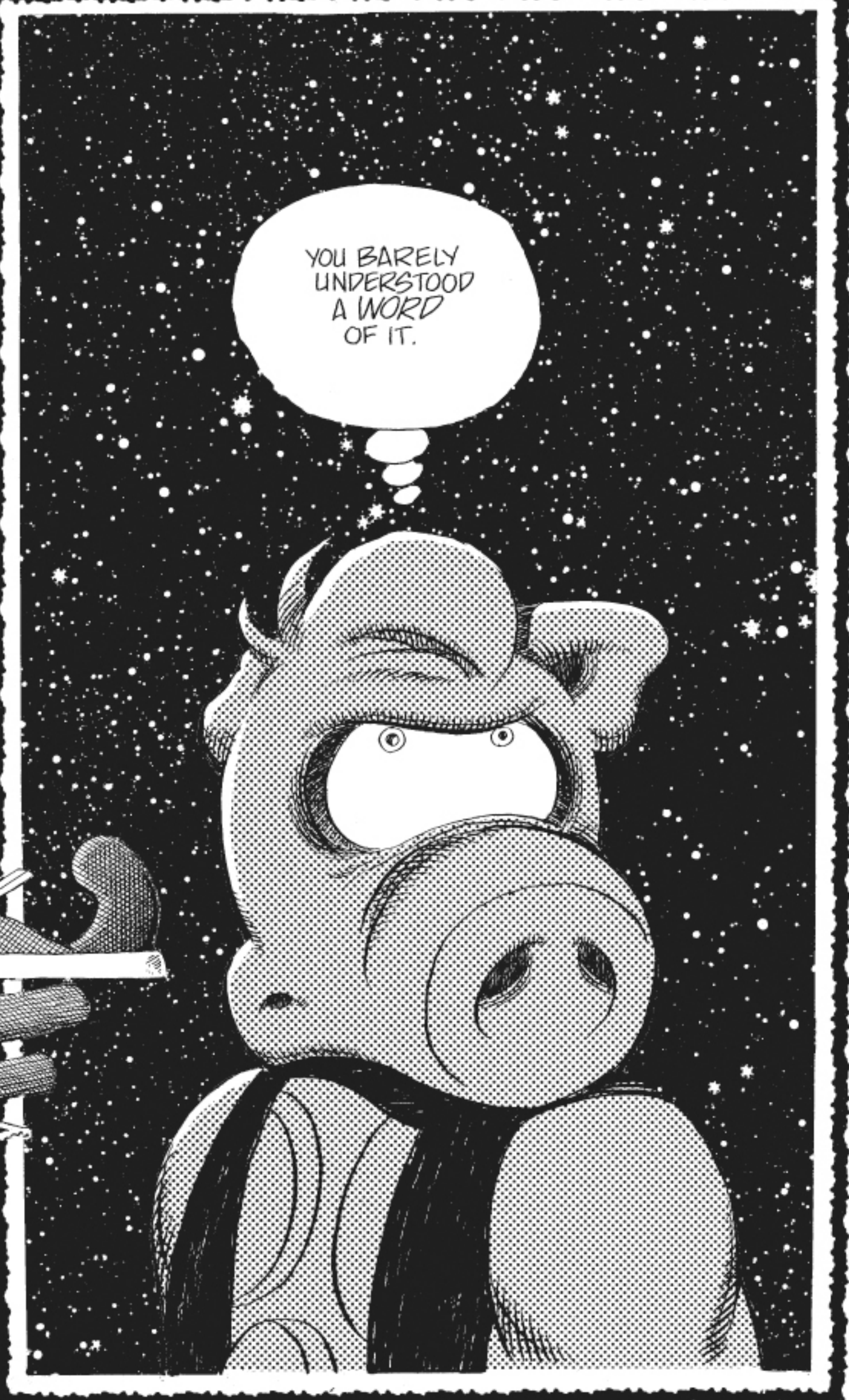
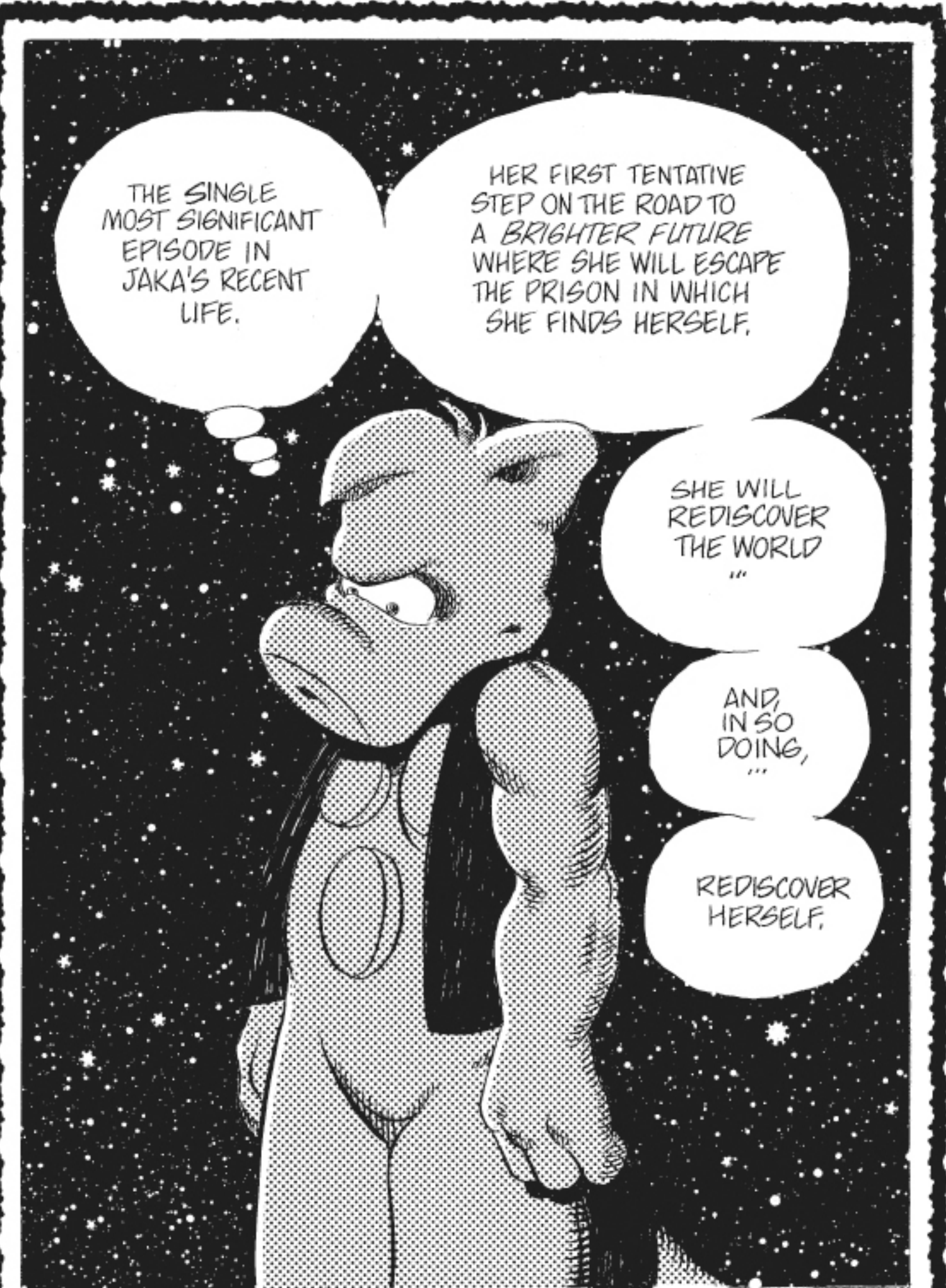
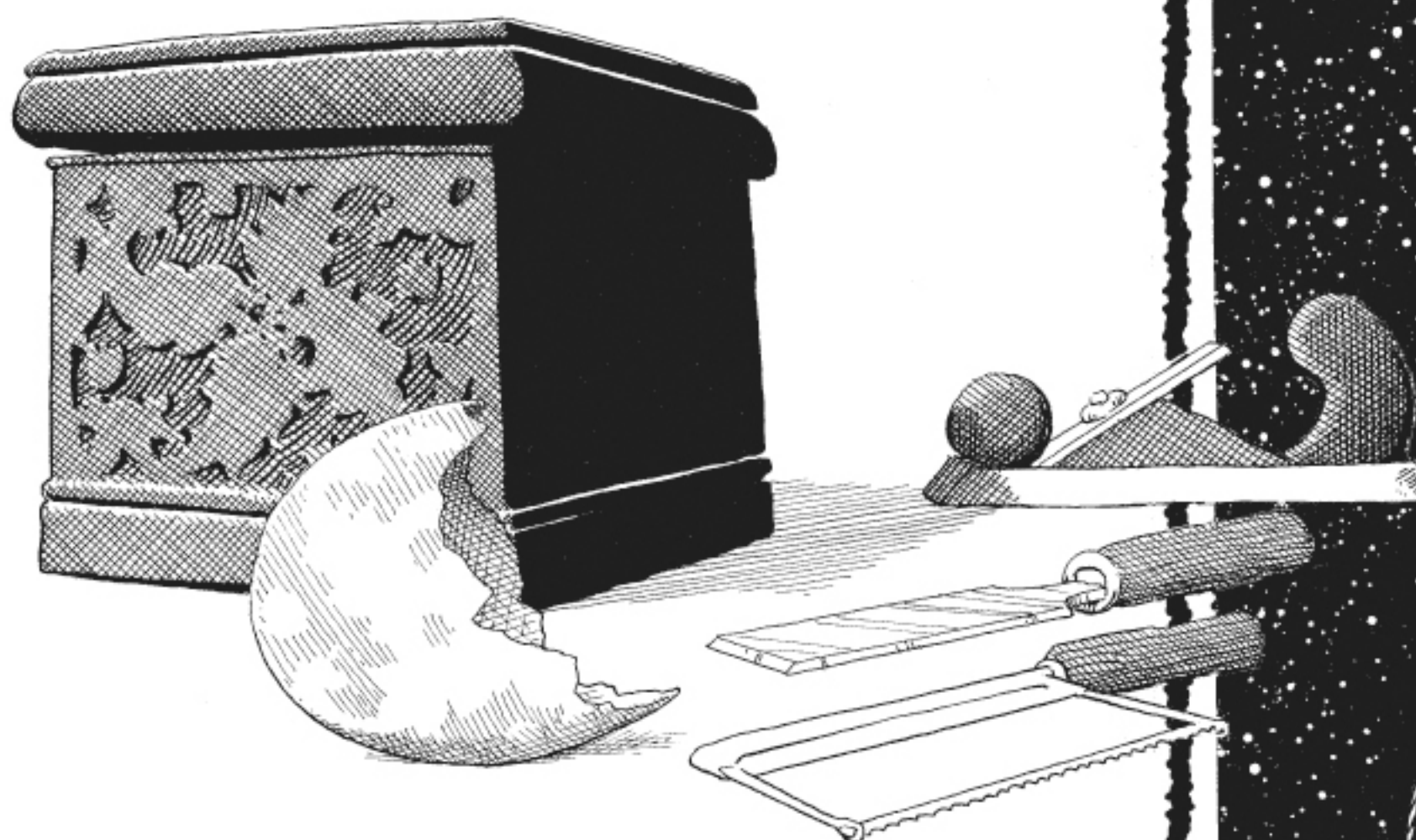
The eggshell had been broken, carefully, into two pieces.

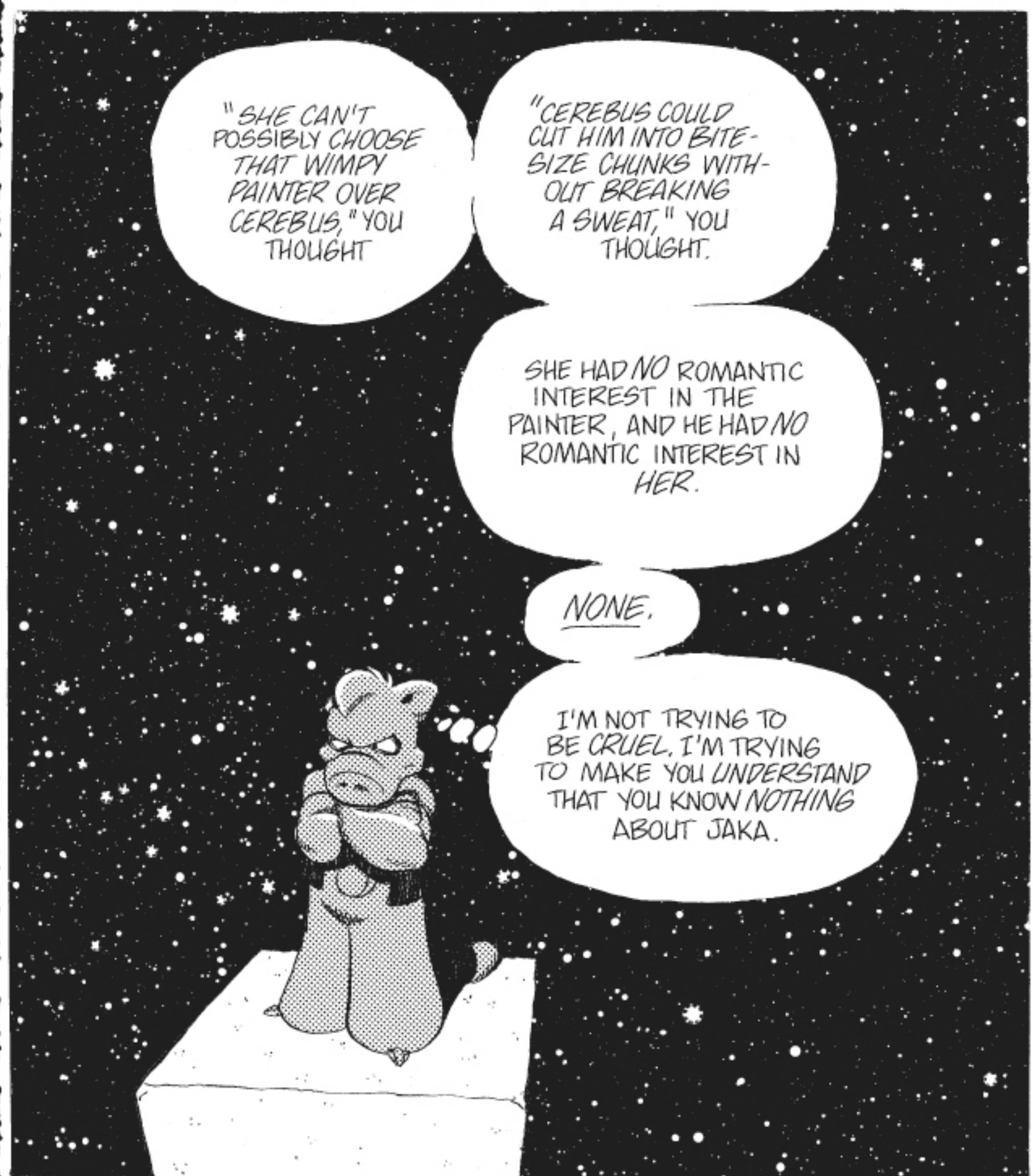
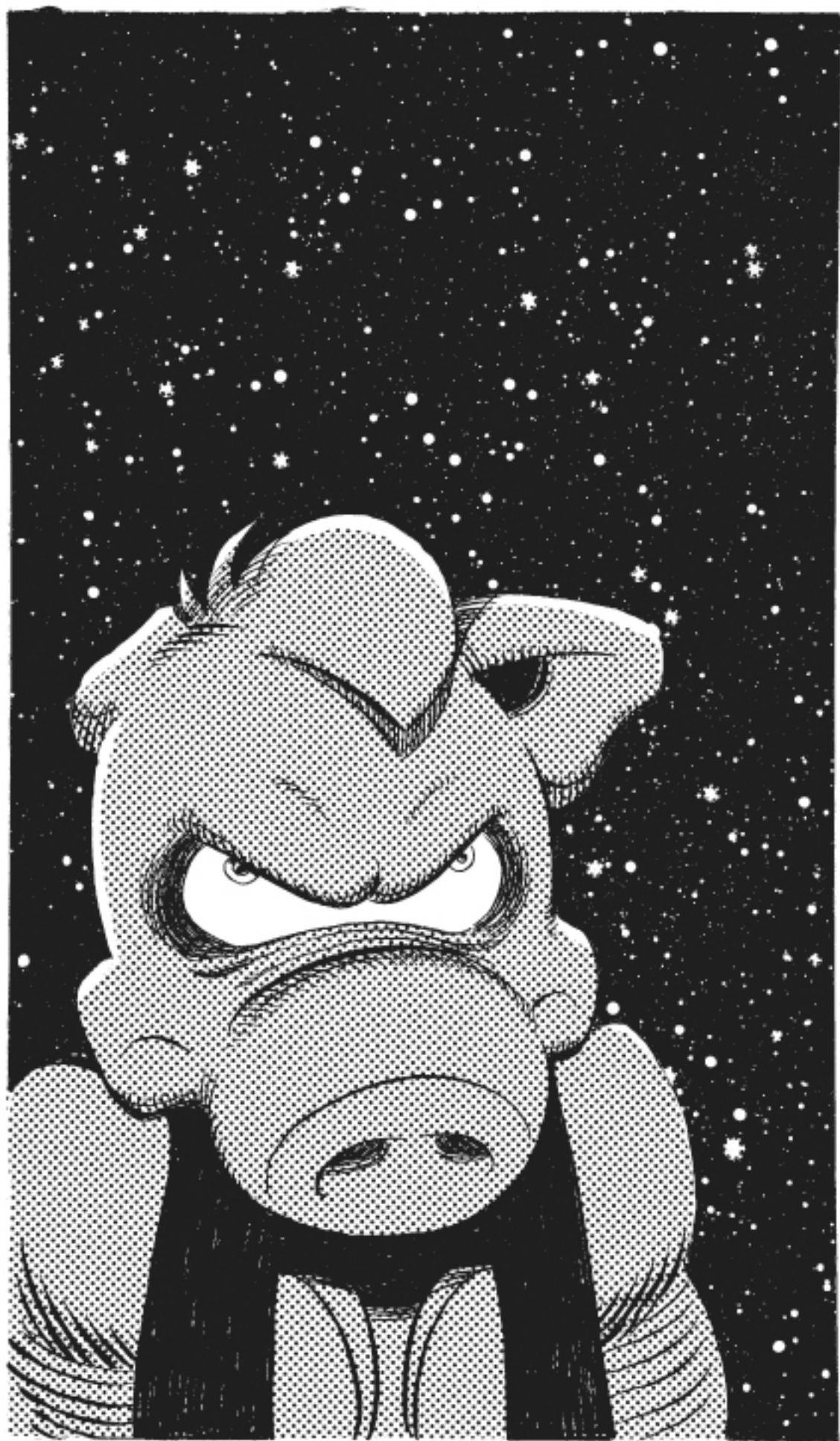


Each night, after completing his work, he would sit contemplating the box and the eggshell halves within. He purchased some fine wood and an inexpensive set of small saws and chisels and planes. After several weeks, his hands scarred and his nails splintered, he had constructed a small, lopsided ebony box whose lid did not fit properly. On its front was carved a relief of that same wallpaper pattern, crude but recognizable.



He lined the box with one of his best silk handkerchiefs: placed one half of the eggshell within it and had it sent, by courier, to her residence.





"SHE CAN'T POSSIBLY CHOOSE THAT WIMPY PAINTER OVER CEREBUS," YOU THOUGHT

"CEREBUS COULD CUT HIM INTO BITE-SIZE CHUNKS WITHOUT BREAKING A SWEAT," YOU THOUGHT.

SHE HAD NO ROMANTIC INTEREST IN THE PAINTER, AND HE HAD NO ROMANTIC INTEREST IN HER.

NONE.

I'M NOT TRYING TO BE CRUEL, I'M TRYING TO MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND THAT YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT JAKA.

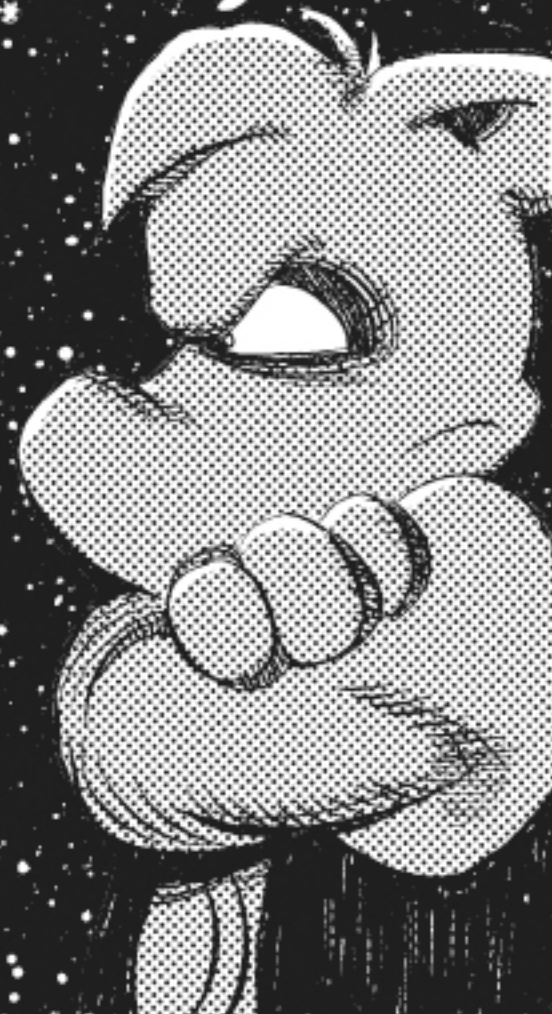
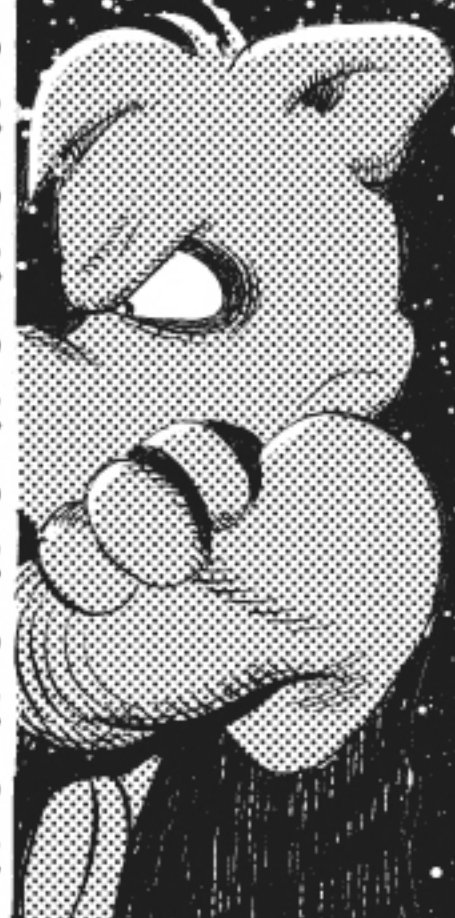
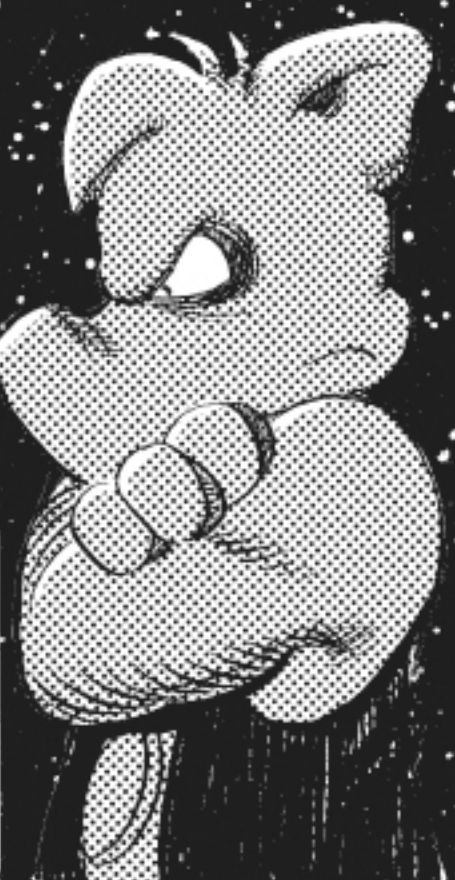


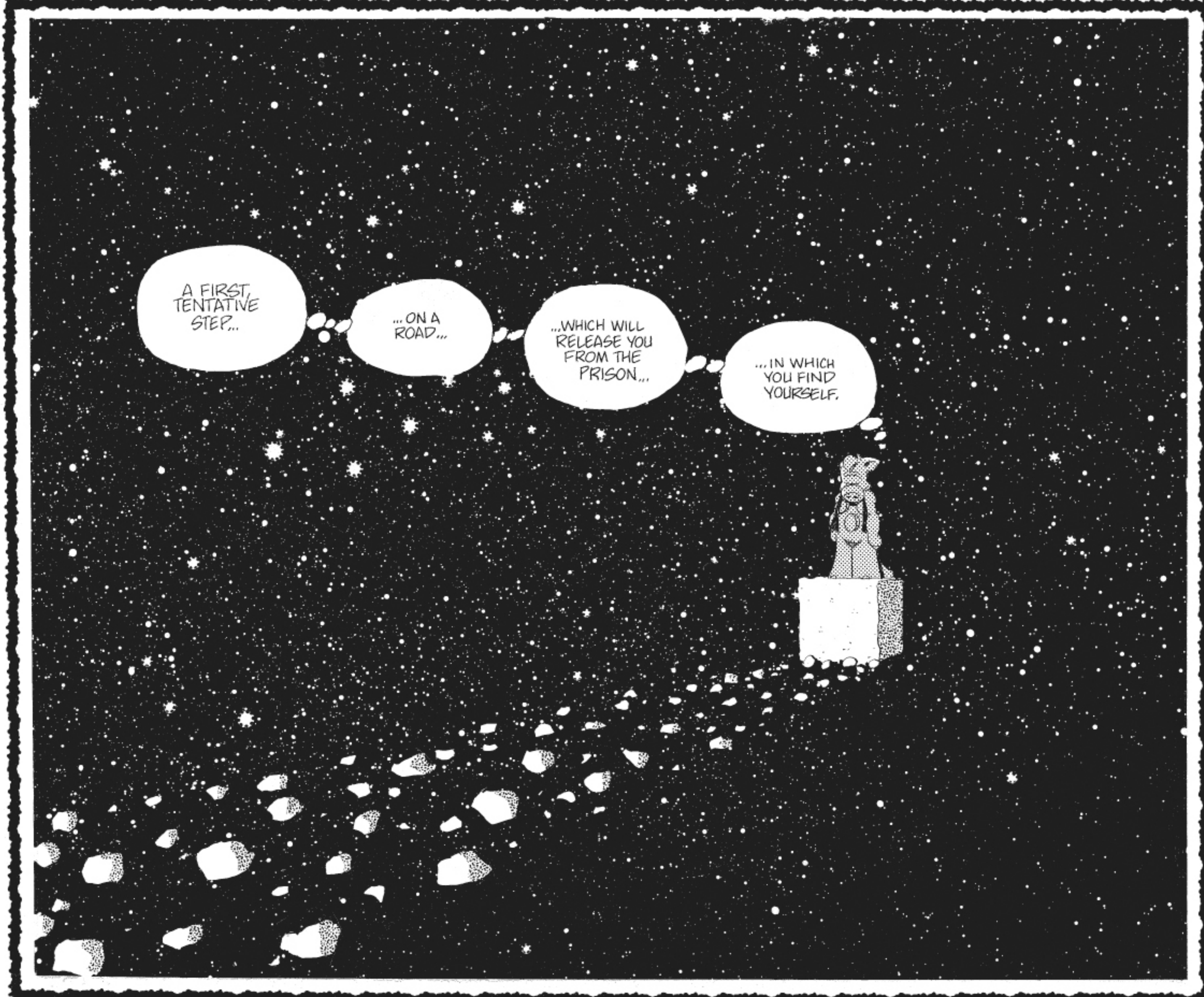
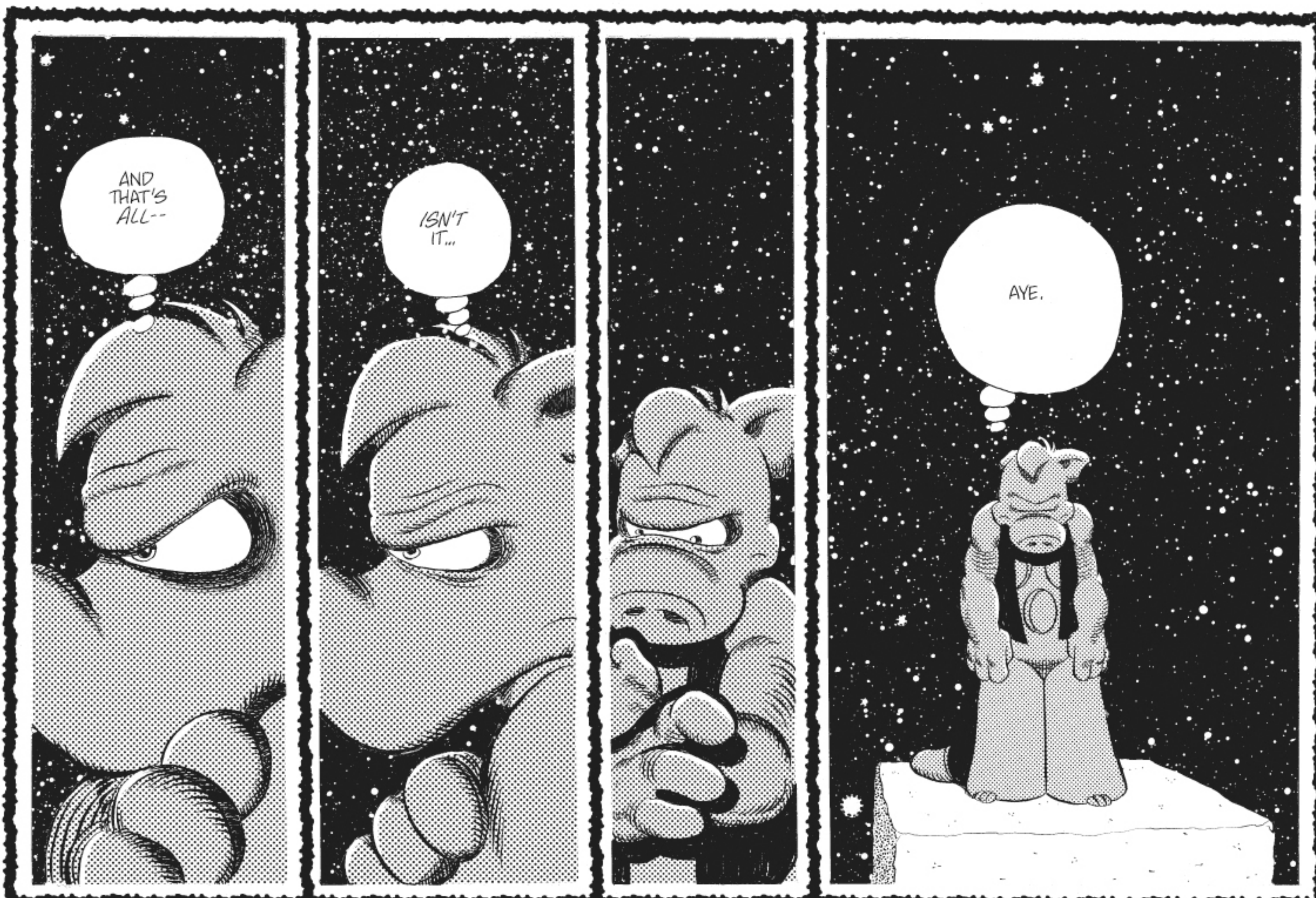
CEREBUS KNOWS THAT HE ~~LOVES~~ HER!

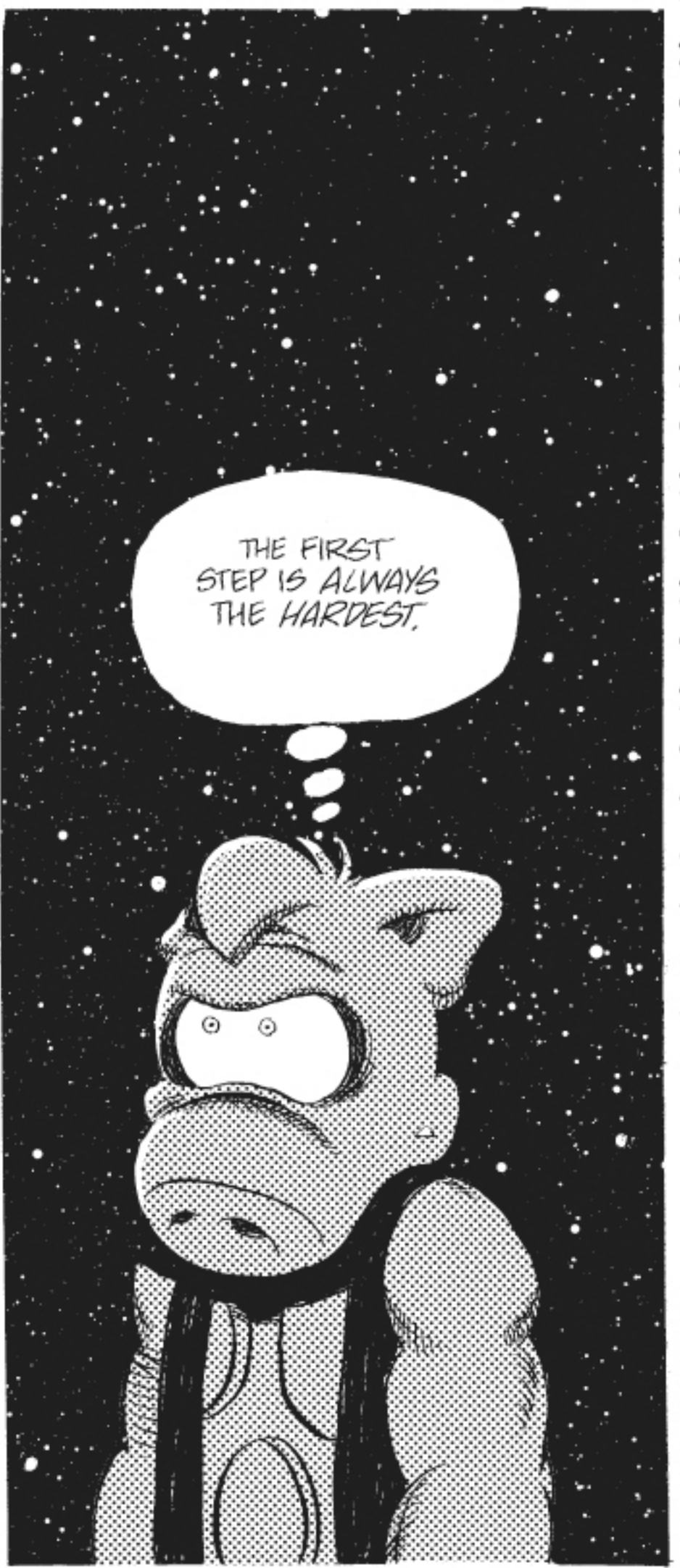
KNOWING THAT YOU LOVE HER ISN'T SOMETHING YOU KNOW ABOUT HER...

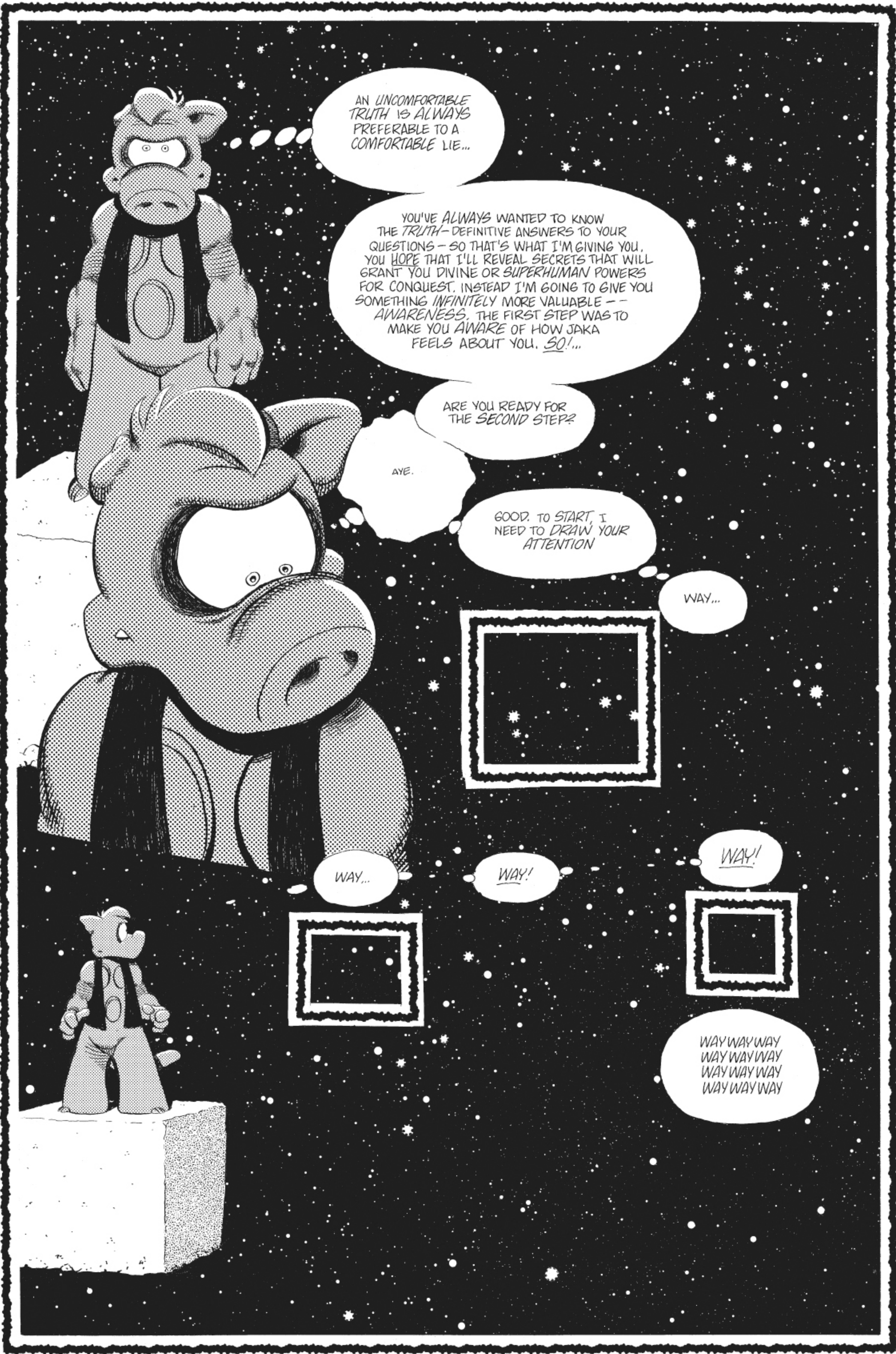
WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT HER-- APART FROM HOW SHE LOOKS?

LORD JULIUS' NIECE
...
DANCER
...
WAS MARRIED TO RICK









AN UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH IS ALWAYS PREFERABLE TO A COMFORTABLE LIE...

YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW THE TRUTH - DEFINITIVE ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS - SO THAT'S WHAT I'M GIVING YOU. YOU HOPE THAT I'LL REVEAL SECRETS THAT WILL GRANT YOU DIVINE OR SUPERHUMAN POWERS FOR CONQUEST. INSTEAD I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU SOMETHING INFINITELY MORE VALUABLE -- AWARENESS. THE FIRST STEP WAS TO MAKE YOU AWARE OF HOW JAKA FEELS ABOUT YOU. SO!...

ARE YOU READY FOR THE SECOND STEP?

AYE.

GOOD. TO START, I NEED TO DRAW YOUR ATTENTION

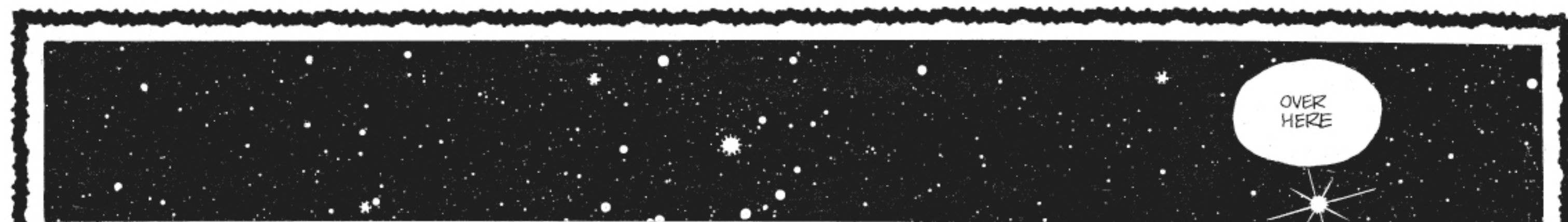
WAY...

WAY...

WAY!

WAY!

WAY WAY WAY
WAY WAY WAY
WAY WAY WAY
WAY WAY WAY





IT'S A STORY THAT SHE KNOWS WELL. IT BEGINS IN THE ANCIENT LIBRARY AT LINSHIB, WHERE TWO WOMEN, ROBED FROM HEAD TO TOE, SIT STUDYING RESEARCH MATERIALS... ONE OF THEM IS NAMED CIRIN. THE OTHER IS SERNA. CIRIN WRITES COPIOUS PAGES UPON COPIOUS PAGES... SERNA OFFERS COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS. CIRIN IS A SCHOLAR OF ANCIENT MATRIARCHAL SOCIETIES, GODDESS WORSHIP AND REVOLUTION -- AT THE END OF EACH DAY, CIRIN DESTROYS ALL SHE HAS WRITTEN AND BEGINS EACH DAY ANEW, REFINING AND DISTILLING HER PROGRAM

AT LAST, WITH TREMBLING HAND, SHE INSCRIBES A SINGLE SHEET OF PAPER -- WHICH WILL NOT BE DESTROYED AT DAY'S END -- WITH "THE FIVE CORNER-STONES": COMMUNAL SAFETY; THE SHARING OF RESOURCES; HARD LABOUR FROM SUNRISE TO SUNSET; QUARTERLY FESTIVALS (LASTING THREE DAYS) OF EXCESS AND DEBAUCHERY; ASCETICISM IN ALL AREAS OF EXISTENCE.

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

THE HUNDRED YEARS' OCCUPATION OF THEIR NATIVE UPPER FELDA IS COMING TO AN END. AS THE SEPRAN LEGIONS WITHDRAW, THEY ARE EXECUTING ALL MALES BETWEEN THE AGES OF FIVE AND FORTY.



SOON, UPPER FELDA WILL BE A COUNTRY COMPOSED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY OF OLD MEN, INFANT BOYS, GIRLS, YOUNG WOMEN...

... AND MOTHERS.



I'M GOING TO INTERRUPT MYSELF HERE TO POINT OUT THAT THIS IS A VERY CONDENSED, VERY COSMETIC HISTORY OF CIRIN'S REVOLUTION

I COULD-- QUITE LITERALLY-- SPEND THE REST OF OUR TIME TOGETHER TELLING YOU ABOUT THE OVERLAPPING HISTORIES AND SOCIETAL FORCES AT WORK.

IF, IN DESCRIBING YOUR LIFE, I SAID "CEREBUS WAS PRIME MINISTER, THEN HE WAS A HOUSE GUEST, THEN PRIME MINISTER, THEN THE POPE AND THEN A HOUSE GUEST AGAIN"... IT WOULD BE COMPARABLE TO THE STORY I'M TELLING YOU

ACCURATE...

BUT SCARCELY THOROUGH.



I'M GOING TO TELL YOU JUST ENOUGH TO MAKE MY POINT -- AND SINCE YOU KNOW VERY LITTLE OF ESTARCION'S HISTORY "JUST ENOUGH" IS ACTUALLY "QUITE A BIT"

WHERE WAS I?

AH!

CIRIN AND SERNA INTRODUCE THEIR REVOLUTION WITHIN THEIR RURAL COMMUNITY OF RIVERSIDE - THE WEEKLY QUILTING CIRCLE THEY HAD PARTICIPATED IN SINCE YOUNG ADULTHOOD. MOTHERS, YOUNG AND OLD, MOST ARE RECENTLY WIDOWED, THEIR HUSBANDS EXECUTED BY THE SEPRAN LEGIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN RECALLED TO SHORE UP A CRUMBLING EMPIRE.

FEAR OF THE FUTURE, MOST PARTICULARLY, THEIR CHILDREN'S FUTURE PROVIDES THEIR MOTIVE IN EMBRACING THE "FIVE CORNERSTONES"

THE GREATEST HURDLE? PERSUADING EVERYONE TO WEAR THE ROBES; BUT CIRIN IS INSISTENT-- ASCETIC LIVING CAN ALLOW FOR NO VANITY AND NO INTRUSION BY VANITY'S DISTINCTIONS: WHO IS ATTRACTIVE AND WHO IS PLAIN? WHOSE HAIR IS LONGEST, THE MOST STYLISH? WHO HAS THE BEST COMPLEXION? THE NICEST CLOTHES?

THE MOST ATTRACTIVE OF THEM, THE ONES WITH THE LONGEST OR THE MOST STYLISH HAIR, THE BEST COMPLEXIONS, THE NICEST CLOTHES ARE THE LAST TO CAPITULATE

A NEW AWARENESS OVERTAKES THEM NOW, INSULATED WITHIN THEIR ROBES. ALL ANXIETY ABOUT THEIR APPEARANCES SUBSIDES. WITH NO COSMETIC BASIS UPON WHICH TO JUDGE ONE ANOTHER, THEIR ATTENTIONS MOVE QUICKLY FROM SURFACE ISSUES TO ISSUES OF SUBSTANCE.



THEY ARE NOW EQUALS.

AND IT IS AS EQUALS THAT THEIR REAL WORK BEGINS.





SO LITTLE IS REQUIRED FOR SUBSISTENCE LIVING... WHAT FOOD THEY HAVE IN THEIR LARDERS IN THIS IMPOVERISHED COMMUNITY IS SHARED EQUALLY— LIKEWISE THEIR TOOLS, UTENSILS, THOSE WHO ARE ADEPT AT HUNTING, HUNT. THOSE WITH AN APTITUDE FOR FISHING, FISH.

FROM DAWN TO DUSK.

CIRIN AND SERNA HAVE NO NAME FOR THEIR REVOLUTION. THE WOMEN ARE KNOWN, VARIOUSLY, AS "THE MOTHERS", "MOTHERHOOD", "THE MOTHERHOOD", OR, SIMPLY, "MOTHERS". WITHIN THE GROUP THEIR ACTIVITIES— GREAT AND SMALL -- ARE REFERRED TO AS "QUILTING"

THE EXISTENCE IS HARD, THE INDIVIDUAL RATIONS SMALL-- MOST OF THESE RESERVED FOR THE CHILDREN WHO ARE CARED FOR IN SHIFTS IN THE FIELDS, BY THE RIVER BANKS, AT THE FISHING HOLES...

THERE ARE NO SUPERVISORY POSITIONS... THOSE WHO DESIGN THE COMFORTABLE DWELLINGS PARTICIPATE IN ALL AREAS OF CONSTRUCTION.

WHERE THERE IS SURPLUS, IT IS STORED CAREFULLY IN ANTICIPATION OF THE NEXT SEASON'S FESTIVAL DAYS.

HARWELL, THE NEAREST VILLAGE, BEGINS TO CHANGE.



AS QUILTING SPREADS TO THE ADJACENT FARM COMMUNITIES, COMMERCE DECLINES IN HARWELL: THE FEW SHOPS CLOSE, THE FARMERS' MARKETPLACE IS SPARSELY ATTENDED, WHICH LEADS TO THE ACCELERATED GROWTH OF QUILTING WHICH LEADS TO A FURTHER DECLINE IN COMMERCE...

AND SO ON.

THE OLD MEN OF THE VILLAGE COUNCIL MEET INFREQUENTLY AND THEN NOT AT ALL-- THEY SOON JOIN THE REMAINING FARMERS IN COMMUNITY TAVERNS SUPPLIED WITH ALE AND HARD LIQUOR BY THE MOTHERHOOD

THE MEN DRINK AND THE WOMEN WORK.

ALL OF THE BUILDINGS IN THE VILLAGE-- EXCEPT THE TAVERN-- ARE TORN DOWN TO MAKE ROOM FOR SMALL DWELLING-PLACES AND MORE FARMLAND

THERE ARE EPISODES OF VIOLENCE IN THE TAVERN (FRUSTRATION AND ALCOHOL MAKE FOR AN EXPLOSIVE MIXTURE), WHICH ARE TOLERATED

THERE ARE ALSO EPISODES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

WHICH ARE NOT TOLERATED.



THIS IS COMMUNAL SAFETY, WHICH IS SERNA'S JURISDICTION (CIRIN CHOOSES TO REMAIN IGNORANT OF THE DETAILS). COMMITTING VIOLENCE AGAINST A WOMAN-- ANY VIOLENCE, ANY WOMAN -- IS PUNISHABLE BY SWIFT EXECUTION.

THESE EXECUTIONS ARE CARRIED OUT BY SERNA UNDER COVER OF NIGHT-- THE ACCUSED'S THROAT IS CUT.

AFTER SEVERAL HUSBANDS AND FATHERS AND GRAND-FATHERS HAVE DIED, ABUSE GOES UNREPORTED FOR A TIME.

ROBES AND HOODS EFFECTIVELY CONCEAL CUTS AND BRUISES

AND THEN A QUIET-NATURED MOTHER MENTIONS OCCASIONAL SLAPS AND PUNCHES ADMINISTERED BY HER HUSBAND OF TWENTY YEARS

HE IS FOUND WITH HIS THROAT CUT...

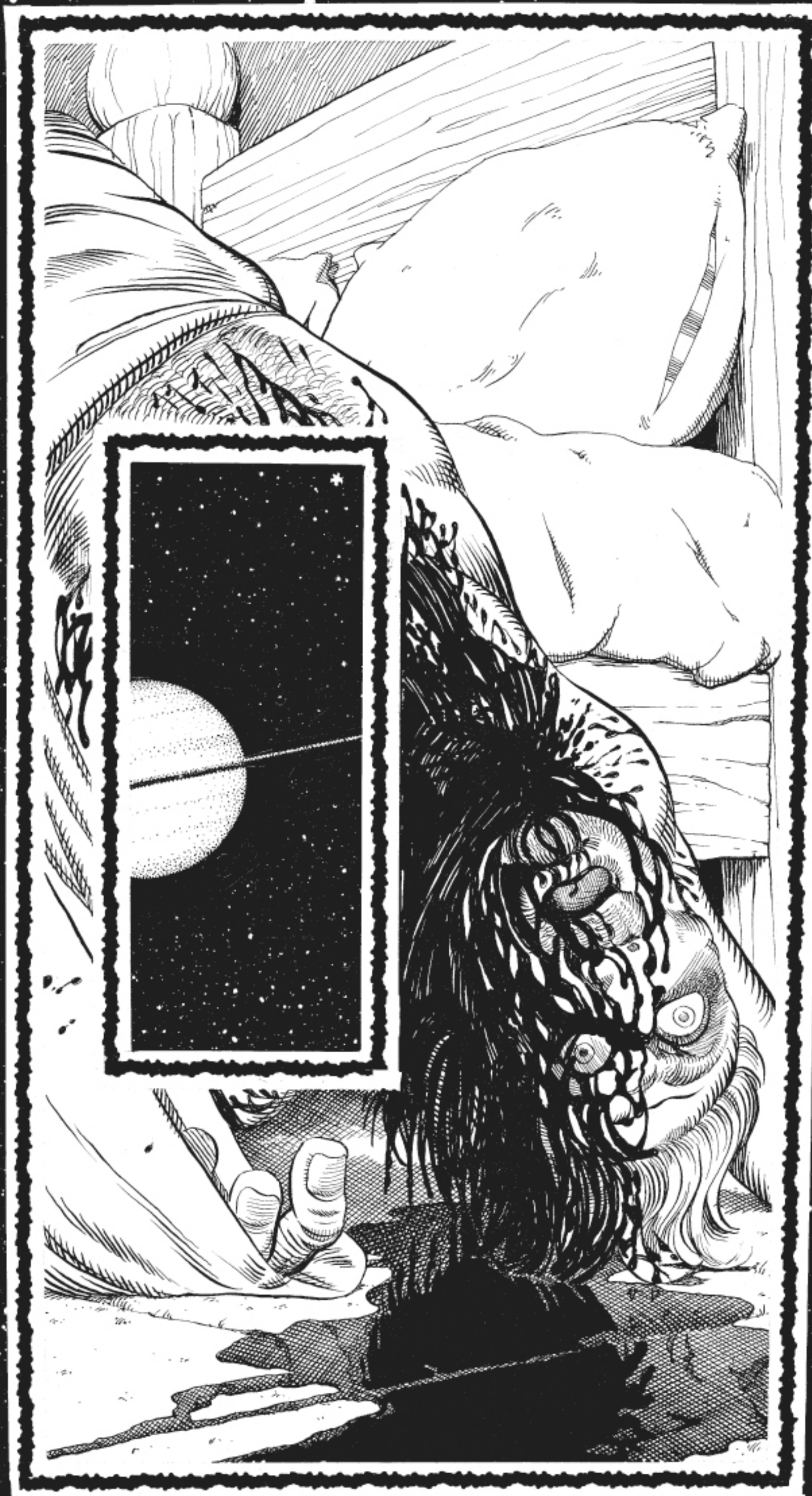
AT THE NEXT QUILTING CIRCLE EVERYONE WAITS TO HEAR WHAT SHE WILL SAY.

SHE DISCUSSES A SWEATER SHE IS KNITTING AND A FAMILY OF RABBITS SHE FOUND THAT MORNING.

SEVERAL MORE PERPETRATORS ARE IDENTIFIED AND EXECUTED

THE MEN GROW OLDER. THE MEN DRINK. THE MEN DIE.

SOON, EVEN THE TAVERN BECOMES FREE FROM VIOLENCE.

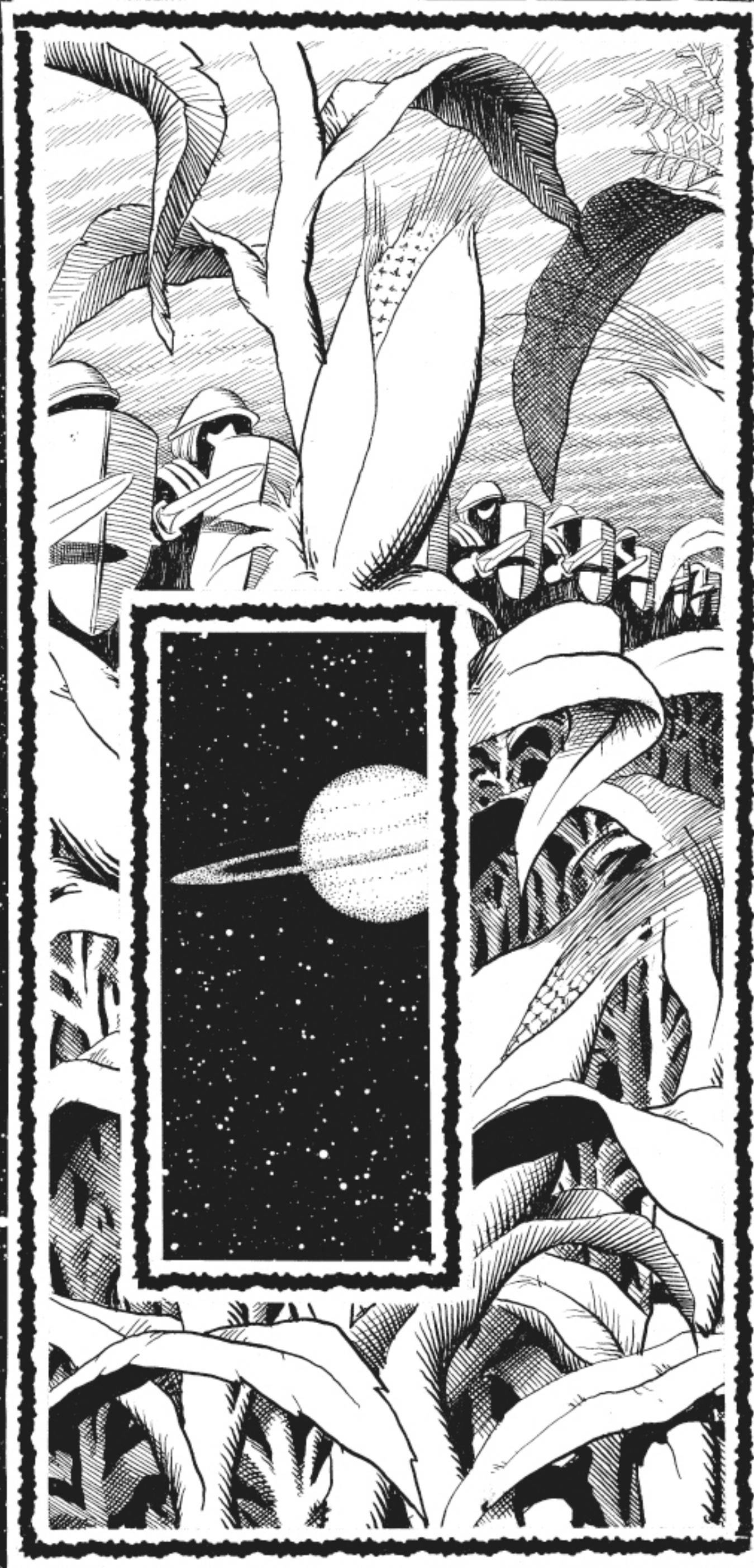


SERNA TRAINS HER SISTERHOOD OF ASSASSINS IN SECRET-- CALLING THEM "CIRINISTS," AN HOMAGE TO THE MASTERMIND OF THE REVOLUTION, SHE SELECTS THE BIGGEST AND THE STRONGEST OF THE WOMEN FOR INDUCTION...

THE BOYS, LIKE THEIR FATHERS AND GRAND-FATHERS DRINK AND OCCUPY THEIR TIME WITH SPORT AND RECREATIONS,

WHEN THEY REACH YOUNG MANHOOD, THEY ARE CHOSEN BY THEIR LIFE MATES FOR PURPOSES OF PROCREATION...

IN THE FIFTH YEAR, LOWER FELDA ATTEMPTS AN INVASION OF ITS EASTERN NEIGHBOUR, SEIZING LAND BUT FINDING THAT THE ONLY FOOD STORES ARE THOSE SET ASIDE FOR THE QUARTERLY FESTIVALS...



THE NUMBER OF MERCENARIES IS DOUBLED, AS IS THE DURATION OF EACH TOUR OF DUTY. THE CASUALTIES QUADRUPLE.

INSIDE OF A YEAR, FIFTY PER-CENT OF THE GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT OF LOWER FELDA IS REQUIRED TO SUPPORT AND MAINTAIN THE TOTTERING OCCUPATIONAL REGIME.

THEY ATTEMPT TO IMPOSE TAXATION AND FIND THAT UPPER FELDA HAS NO CURRENCY OR PRECIOUS METALS. BUILDINGS AND RESIDENCES TO HOUSE THE OCCUPATIONAL GOVERNMENT MUST BE CONSTRUCTED FROM MATERIALS IMPORTED AT PROHIBITIVE EXPENSE.

SOLDIERS ATTEMPTING TO PRESS THE MOTHERS INTO SERVICE ARE FOUND WITH THEIR THROATS CUT.

FRUSTRATION REACHES THE BOILING POINT IN LOWER FELDA. A MILITARY COUP DISPLACES THE OLIGARCHY. THE LARGEST MILITARY FORCE IN LOWER FELDA HISTORY IS MOUNTED, WHICH ONLY ESCALATES THE CASUALTY RATE. AFTER TWO YEARS THE ORDER IS GIVEN FOR LOWER FELDA FORCES TO WITHDRAW

ALL LOWER FELDA CIVILIANS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES ARE ALSO ORDERED TO RETURN HOME.

A NETWORK OF FORTRESSES, CONNECTED BY STONE WALLS TWO METERS THICK AND SEVEN METERS HIGH IS CONSTRUCTED BY THE LOWER FELDANS ALONG THE BORDER - THE GREAT IRON BARRIER



IN THE FARMING COMMUNITIES OF LOWER FELDA-- REPRESENTING EIGHTY PERCENT OF ITS TERRITORY

REPATRIATED LOWER FELDA MOTHERS DON ROBES AND HOODS AND FORM QUILTING CIRCLES.

COMMERCE IN THE SMALL VILLAGES AND TOWNS BEGINS TO SUFFER.

URBAN ECONOMIES RAVAGED BY THE BURDEN OF MILITARY MISADVENTURE DECLINE EVEN MORE RAPIDLY.



THE LOWER FELDAN MILITARY DICTATORSHIP (HUMILIATED BY UPPER FELDA) ARE THE FIRST TO MYTHOLOGIZE THE "CIRINISTS" AS A RACE OF BLOODTHIRSTY AMAZONS, NOCTURNAL DEMONESSES HUNTING, DISEMBOWELING AND DEVOURING THEIR HUMAN PREY.

CIRIN IS REPUTED TO BE THOUSANDS OF YEARS OLD, CAPABLE OF TRANSFORMING HERSELF INTO ANY PREDATORY ANIMAL OR BIRD, RENDERING HERSELF INVISIBLE AND ROAMING THE MOONLIT FELDWAR COUNTRYSIDE AS A DISEMBODIED SHADOW.

READS PUBLISHERS SEIZE ON THIS NEW DEMONIZED FOE (HAVING EXHAUSTED THE HSIFANS' POTENTIAL SOME TIME BEFORE), MANY LONG-OUT-OF-PRINT READS DEALING WITH MATRIMONY AND MOTHERHOOD ARE CREDITED TO CIRIN AND (WITH THE ADDITION OF LURID COVERS AND ILLUSTRATIONS AND THE APPENDING OF BLOODY RETRIBUTION TO THEIR HOMEMAKER HOMILIES) DOMINATE THE BEST-SELLER LISTS.

THE QUILTING CIRCLES SPREAD THROUGHOUT LOWER FELDA AND THE RURAL AREAS OF IEST-- HOODS AND ROBES MORE EFFECTIVE THAN SHIELDS AND SWORDS IN MAINTAINING SAFETY...

SERNA FINDS HERSELF NEARLY OVERWHELMED BY APPLICANTS TO THE "SECRET" SISTERHOOD-- EACH QUILTING CIRCLE SOON BOASTS AT LEAST A HALF DOZEN "COMMUNAL SAFETY OFFICERS"

THE NAME CHANGE IS NECESSARY: "CIRINIST" BECOMES THE UNIVERSAL DESIGNATION FOR THE HOODED AND ROBED WOMEN

DESPITE CIRIN'S OBJECTIONS





CIRIN IS CONCERNED BY THE INCREASING MILITANCY OF SERNA'S SISTERHOOD... IN AN ATTEMPT TO REAWAKEN HER MOVEMENT'S HARMONIOUS FOUNDATION, COMMUNAL SAFETY OFFICERS ARE EXCUSED FROM THE QUILTING CIRCLE GATHERINGS...

THE RESOURCES ARE STILL DIVIDED EQUALLY, BUT NOW THE COMMUNAL SAFETY OFFICERS DEPART BEFORE THE ACTUAL QUILTING BEGINS.

SOON- ONLY A COMMUNAL SAFETY "DELEGATE" ATTENDS, REQUISITIONING TEN PERCENT OF THE RESOURCES.

THEN FIFTEEN PERCENT.

THEN TWENTY

THEN TWENTY-FIVE.

ONE NIGHT, CIRIN AWAKENS TO THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS INSIDE HER MODEST DWELLING,





YOU ARE CHARGED
WITH UNDERMINING
THE FIVE CORNERSTONES
THROUGH EXCESSIVE
APPROPRIATION OF
RESOURCES FOR
COMMUNAL
SAFETY

ARE YOU
...MAD?

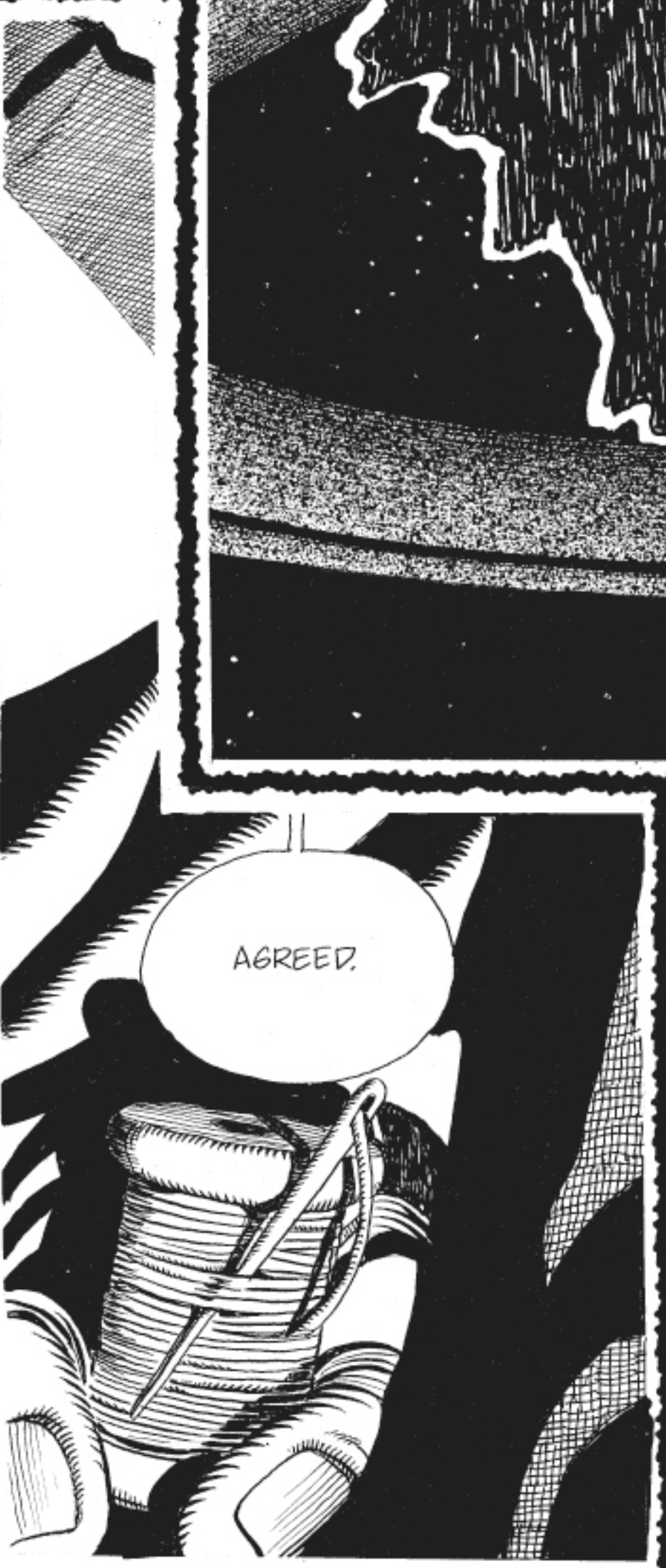
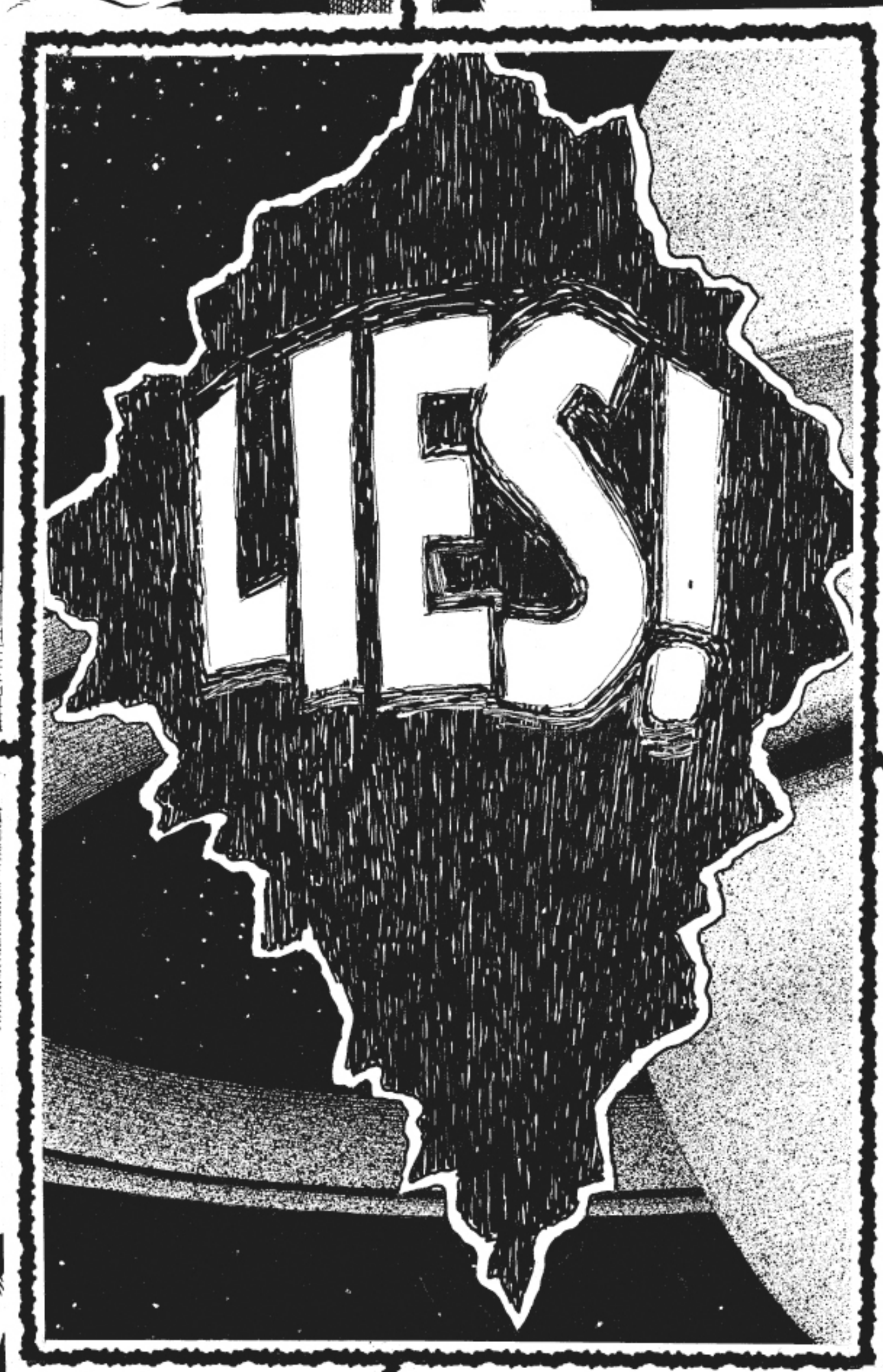
NO,
SERNA.

YOU
ARE THE
ONE WHO'S
MAD.

LIES!

"UNDERMINING
THE FIVE
CORNERSTONES"

CHANGING
OTHERS' MINDS
IS A WOMAN'S
DARKEST
SECRET







"SERNA" IS KEPT ALIVE
UNDER ARMED GUARD.
"CIRIN" IS WIDELY PRAISED
FOR EXHIBITING SUCH
COMPASSION TOWARDS
THE ONE WHO HAS
BETRAYED THE
MOTHERHOOD.

SHE IS
PUT ON PUBLIC
DISPLAY, VILLIFIED
FOR HER GREED
AND ARROGANCE

"CIRIN" GOES INTO
SECLUSION, "DISTRAUGHT"
OVER THE "BETRAYAL"
OF "HER" MOVEMENT

SHE VOWS THAT
RATIONS FOR
COMMUNAL SAFETY
WILL NEVER AGAIN
EXCEED TEN
PERCENT

SHE ASSUMES CONTROL
OF THE COMMUNAL SAFETY
OFFICERS AS "PENANCE", CONSTRUCTING
HER "FORTRESS OF SADNESS" - THE
LARGEST MILITARY COMPOUND
IN THE FELDWAR VALLEY.

"TEN PERCENT OF RATIONS
FOR COMMUNAL SAFETY"
BECOMES THE SIXTH
CORNERSTONE

"SERNA" IS KEPT ALIVE
UNDER ARMED GUARD.
"CIRIN" IS WIDELY PRAISED
FOR EXHIBITING SUCH
COMPASSION TOWARDS
THE ONE WHO HAS
BETRAYED THE
MOTHERHOOD.



SERNA - AS YOU CAN
HEAR - IS UNABLE TO
ACKNOWLEDGE HER PAST.
IT IS THE COMMONEST
OF MISAPPREHENSIONS
THAT AN ACT OF BAD FAITH
DID NOT TAKE PLACE IF IT
WENT UNNOTICED.

SHE INHERITED CIRIN'S
METICULOUSLY CRAFTED
MOVEMENT SO THOROUGHLY
IN TUNE WITH HUMAN
NATURE AND HUMAN
IDEALS...

...AND GRAFTED ONTO IT A
WAR MACHINE WHICH
HAD ABSOLUTE TOLERANCE
FOR THE FREE EXPRESSION
OF IDEAS AND A BRUTAL
INTOLERANCE OF ANY ACTION
TAKEN OUTSIDE OF CLEARLY
DEFINED PARAMETERS.

AGAIN, THOROUGHLY
IN TUNE WITH
HUMAN NATURE
AND HUMAN
IDEALS.

THE QUILTING CIRCLES
ARE THE ENGINE WHICH DRIVES
THE MOVEMENT, WEAKENING AND
MAKING VULNERABLE EACH
OLIGARCHY, EACH DICTATORSHIP,
EACH URBAN CENTER, EACH
SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT...

COUNTRY AFTER COUNTRY
FALLS TO THEM -- VIRTUALLY
WITHOUT BLOODSHED, INTO
THE POWER VACUUM STEPS
THE FORMER SERNA AND HER
COMMUNAL SAFETY OFFICERS

THEY ARE MORE FEARED THAN
RESPECTED, BUT A CONSENSUS
PREVAILS: "SAFETY FIRST", "ONLY
THE VIOLENT ARE PUNISHED".

IN ANY ENVIRONMENT, THE
SYSTEM WHICH IS THE MOST
TOLERANT OF DISSENT, WHICHEVER
SYSTEM BEST MIRRORS
HUMAN NATURE WILL
FLOURISH, HOWEVER
IMPERFECT IT MIGHT BE.

THE LEAST IMPERFECT
SYSTEM WINS -- SO
TO SPEAK

WHICH IS WHY
YOU COULD NEVER
CONQUER ESTARCION.



BLUNTLY PUT, YOU HAVE
NOTHING TO OFFER-- YOU
HAVE NO SYSTEM IN MIND
IMPERFECT OR OTHERWISE.

BEING PRIME MINISTER,
BEING POPE SHOULD HAVE
SHOWED YOU THAT-- BUT
OBVIOUSLY DIDN'T,

MORE ON
THAT IN A
MOMENT.



CIRIN WANTED TO HELP
AND SHE DID HELP. SHE
REPLACED COMPETITIVENESS,
GREED AND VIOLENCE
WITH COOPERATIVENESS,
SELFLESSNESS AND
PEACE.

SHE LIVED EXACTLY AS
SHE THOUGHT OTHERS
SHOULD LIVE. SHE DID
HER FAIR SHARE OF
THE WORK

AND SHARED--
EQUALLY--IN ITS
REWARDS

NO MORE
AND NO
LESS.

SERNA IS AN AARDVARK.
LIKE YOU, SHE... MAGNIFIES
TRAITS IN OTHER PEOPLE. SHE
MAGNIFIED CIRIN'S OWN NATURE
AND MADE THE MOTHERHOOD
POSSIBLE

CIRIN INTRODUCED THE ROBES
AND THE HOODS-- ORIGINALLY-- TO
ALLEVIATE HER DEAREST FRIEND'S
ANXIETY ABOUT HAVING MISSHAPEN
FEATURES...

...
TO ALLOW HER TO PASS MORE FREELY
AMONG "NORMAL" PEOPLE. WHAT CIRIN
DIDN'T REALISE WAS THAT SERNA'S
RESENTMENT AT BEING CONSIDERED
A "MONSTER" WAS ONLY MADE
WORSE BY BEING CONSIDERED
"ORDINARY"...

FROM A VERY EARLY AGE
SERNA HAD COMPENSATED FOR
BEING CONSIDERED WORTHLESS
BY DECIDING THAT SHE WAS
SUPERIOR-- INFINITELY
SUPERIOR-- TO EVERYONE.



IT WAS FOR THAT REASON THAT SERNA COULDN'T CONTENT HERSELF WITH MERELY USURPING POWER-- CIRIN HAD TO BE HUMILIATED. SHE HAD TO SUFFER THE PAIN, PHYSICALLY, WHICH SERNA HAD SUFFERED EMOTIONALLY. SHE HAD TO BE SEEN AS A WORTHLESS AND DESPISED FIGURE IN THE EYES OF THE MOVEMENT SHE HAD FOUNDED.

WHILE THE QUILTING CIRCLES FLOURISH WITH COOPERATIVENESS, SELFLESSNESS AND PEACE AS THEIR FOUNDATION, SERNA FEELS HERSELF CRUSHED BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HER COMMUNAL SAFETY OFFICERS -- ALTHOUGH LOYAL AND DUTIFUL -- ARE THOROUGHLY UNHAPPY.

THEY HAVE THE HIGHEST SUICIDE RATE OF ANY GROUP IN ESTARCION. THEY ARE THE MOST APT TO ABUSE OR KILL THEIR CHILDREN. DAUGHTERS WHO ARE VICTIMS OF ABUSE ARE, MOST OFTEN, THE ONES WHO CHOOSE TO BECOME COMMUNAL SAFETY OFFICERS.

SERNA HAS WHAT YOU DESIRE MOST. SHE HAS CONQUERED ESTARCION ... SHE HAS THE UNQUESTIONING LOYALTY OF HER MILITARY UNDERLINGS.

SHE IS AN UNHAPPY PERSON WITH NEARLY LIMITLESS POWER.

SHE KEEPS CIRIN CLOSE BY. IT WAS MANY YEARS -- NOT UNTIL SHE HAD CONQUERED IEST -- BEFORE SHE WOULD CUT THE TWINE WHICH BOUND CIRIN'S LIPS. RIDING THE EMOTIONAL CREST OF HER GREATEST MILITARY VICTORY, SHE IS OVERCOME BY HER CURIOSITY.

WHAT WILL HER FORMER MENTOR SAY? TWO WORDS, WHISPERED, PAINFULLY THROUGH THE SCARRED AND ATROPHIED LIPS:

"I... UNDERSTAND."

SERNA, ENRAGED BEATS CIRIN INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS. SHE DOES NOT, HOWEVER, HAVE CIRIN'S LIPS SEWN SHUT AGAIN. IT IS ONE OF THOSE DECISIONS A CREATION MAKES WHICH IS INEXPLICABLE EVEN TO HER (OR HIS) CREATOR...

INSTEAD A GUARD-STENOGRAPHER IS ASSIGNED. EACH NIGHT, A FULL TRANSCRIPT OF CIRIN'S WORDS IS BROUGHT TO SERNA

CIRIN RECITES POETRY FOR THE MOST PART, REMINISCES ABOUT THE EARLY DAYS OF THE MOVEMENT, ATTEMPTS TO ENGAGE THE GUARD-STENOGRAPHER IN CONVERSATION AND (REBUFFED) REMINISCES ABOUT HER FRIENDS AND THEIR CHILDREN

CREATORS CAN ONLY OBSERVE ACTIONS AND HEAR WORDS. WHAT GOES THROUGH SERNA'S MIND AS SHE PORES OVER THE TRANSCRIPTS? SHE OCCASIONALLY HURLS THEM AWAY FROM HER (BUT ALWAYS RETRIEVES THEM) AND OFTEN MUTTERS "LIES" OR "MADNESS" (BUT CONTINUES READING)

THE UNMISTAKABLE IMPRESSION I'M LEFT WITH IS THAT SHE HAS, INDEED, CONVINCED HERSELF THAT SHE IS CIRIN. HER PRODIGIOUS TELEPATHIC ABILITIES WERE TURNED INWARD AND REMOVED ALL MEMORY OF HER "COUP", WHICH DID-- I CAN ASSURE YOU -- TAKE PLACE

EVEN AFTER THE REAL CIRIN HAD HER LITTLE "CHAT" WITH YOU, SERNA DID NOT ORDER CIRIN'S LIPS RESEALED (AS I HAD EXPECTED SHE WOULD)

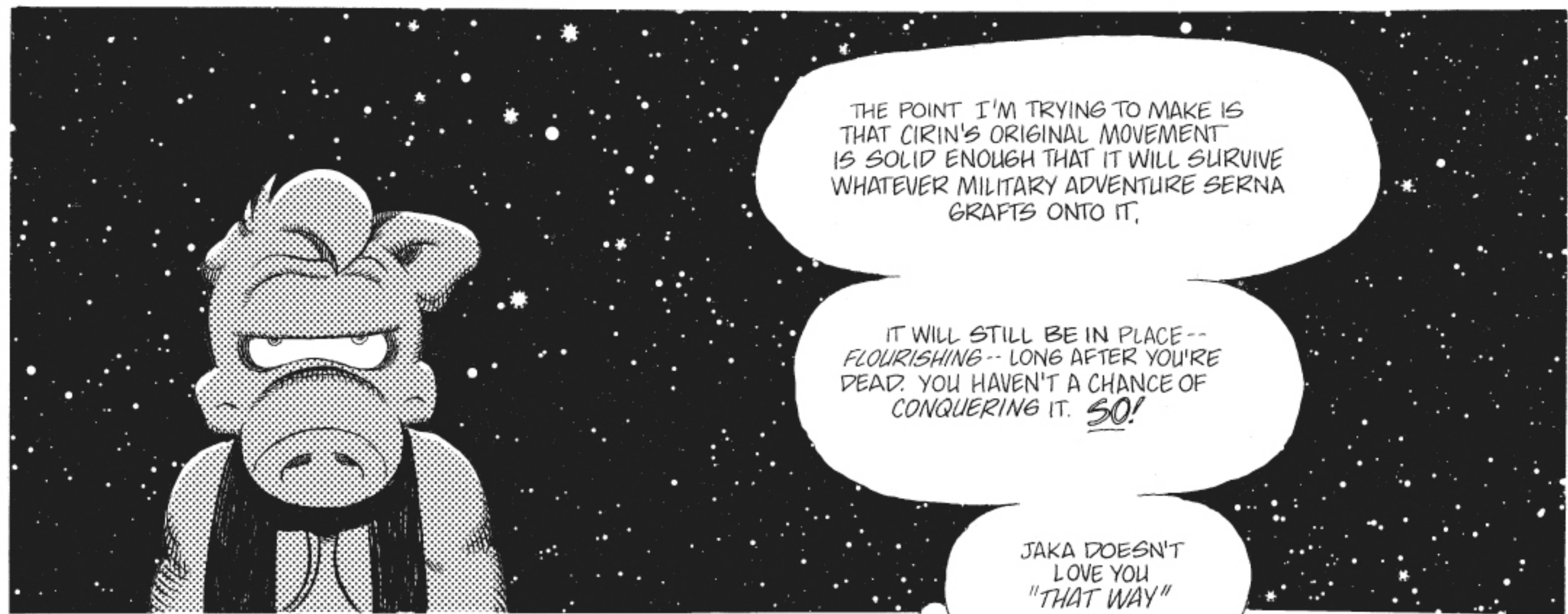
OF COURSE, ONCE I'VE RETURNED SERNA TO THE



SORRY.

FORGOT WHO I WAS DEALING WITH HERE.

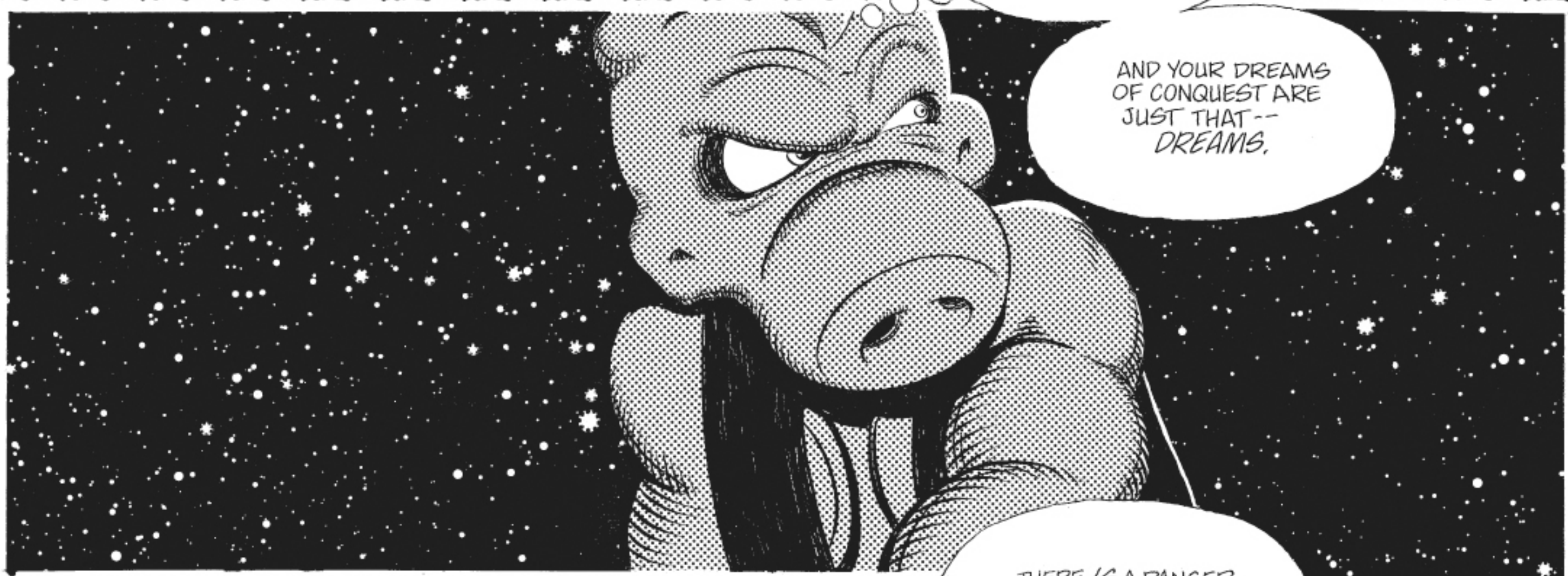
SKETCHA SKETCH



THE POINT I'M TRYING TO MAKE IS
THAT CIRIN'S ORIGINAL MOVEMENT
IS SOLID ENOUGH THAT IT WILL SURVIVE
WHATEVER MILITARY ADVENTURE SERNA
GRAFTS ONTO IT.

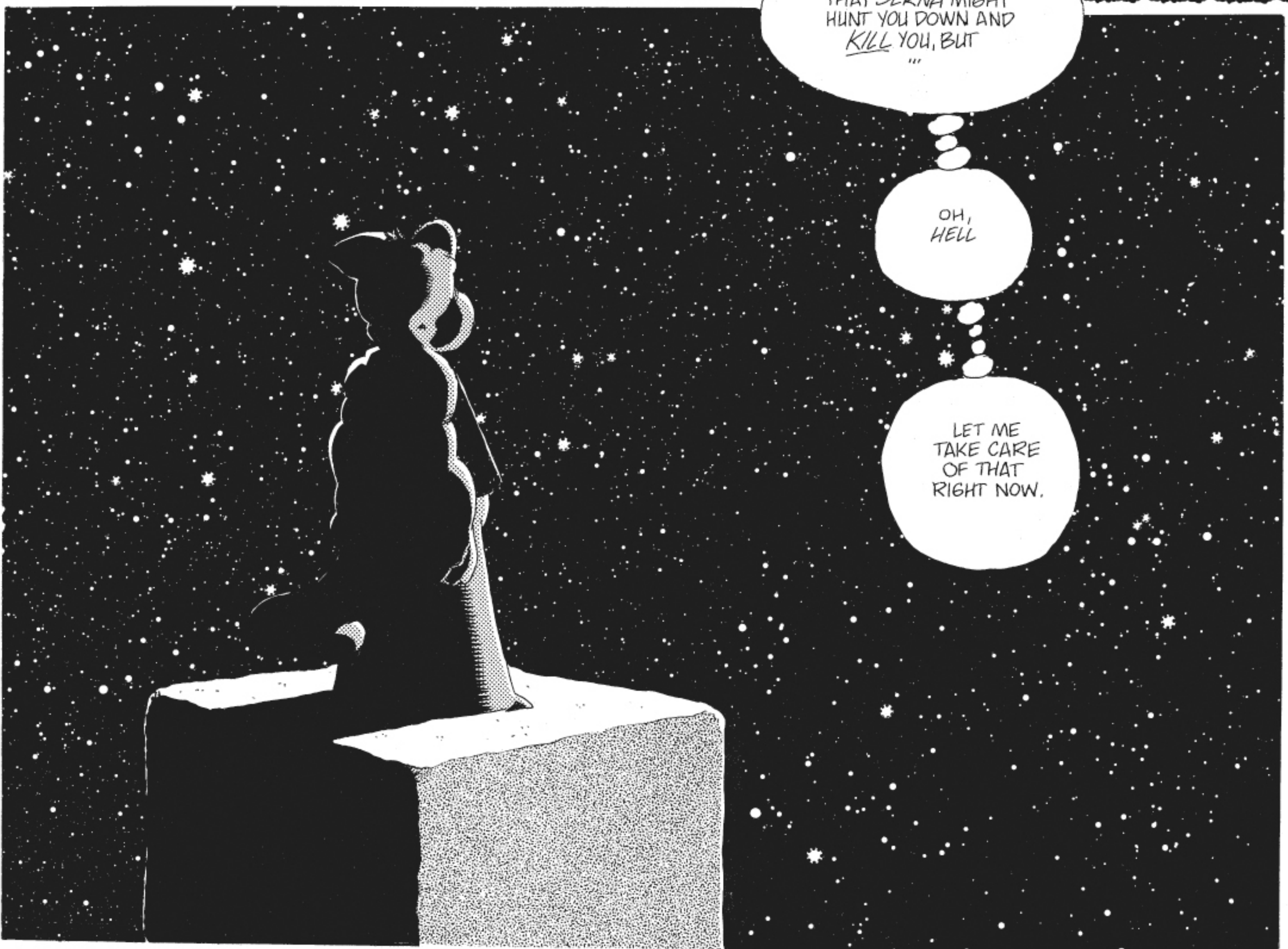
IT WILL STILL BE IN PLACE--
FLOURISHING-- LONG AFTER YOU'RE
DEAD. YOU HAVEN'T A CHANCE OF
CONQUERING IT. SO!

JAKA DOESN'T
LOVE YOU
"THAT WAY"



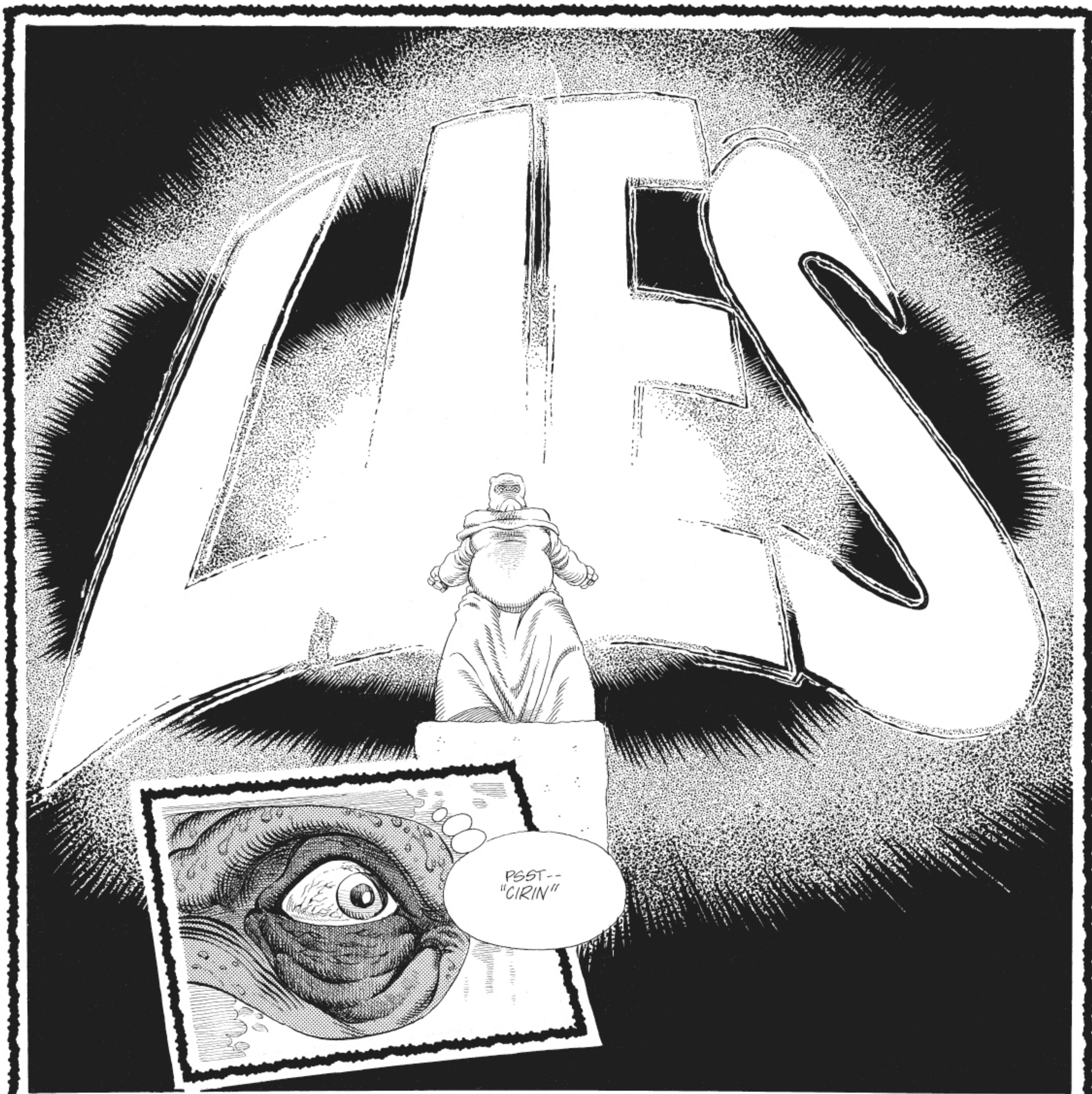
AND YOUR DREAMS
OF CONQUEST ARE
JUST THAT--
DREAMS.

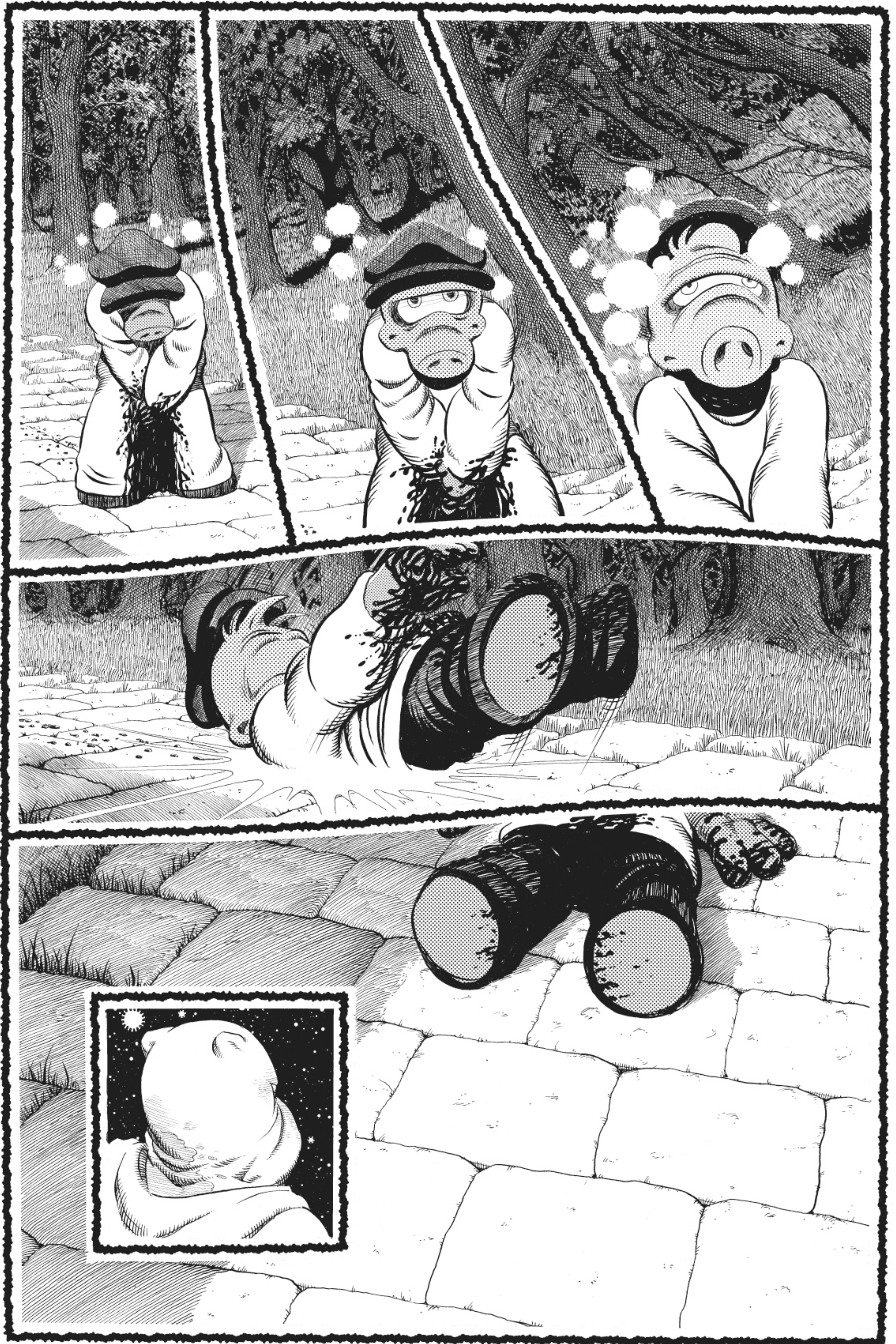
THERE IS A DANGER
THAT SERNA MIGHT
HUNT YOU DOWN AND
KILL YOU, BUT
"

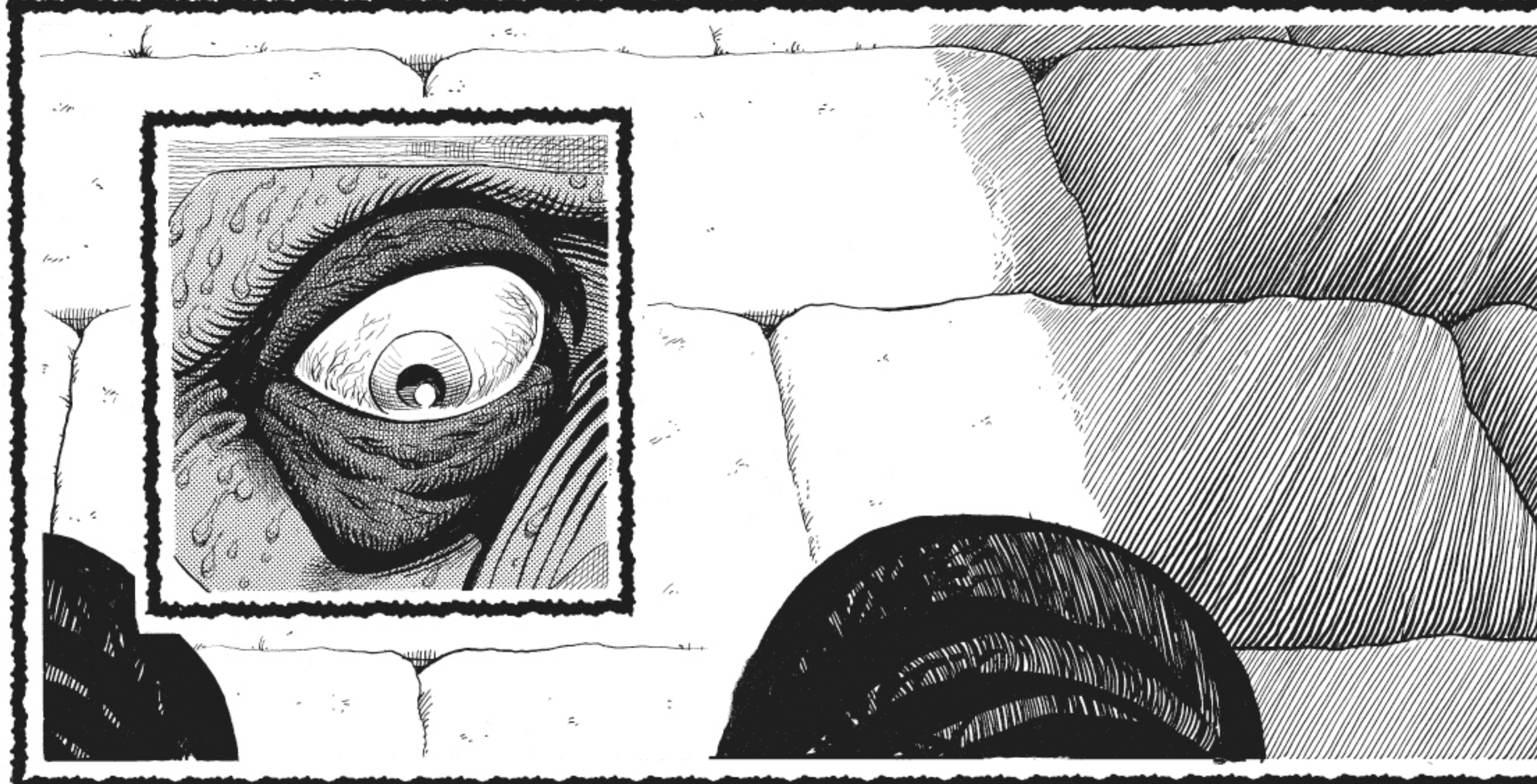
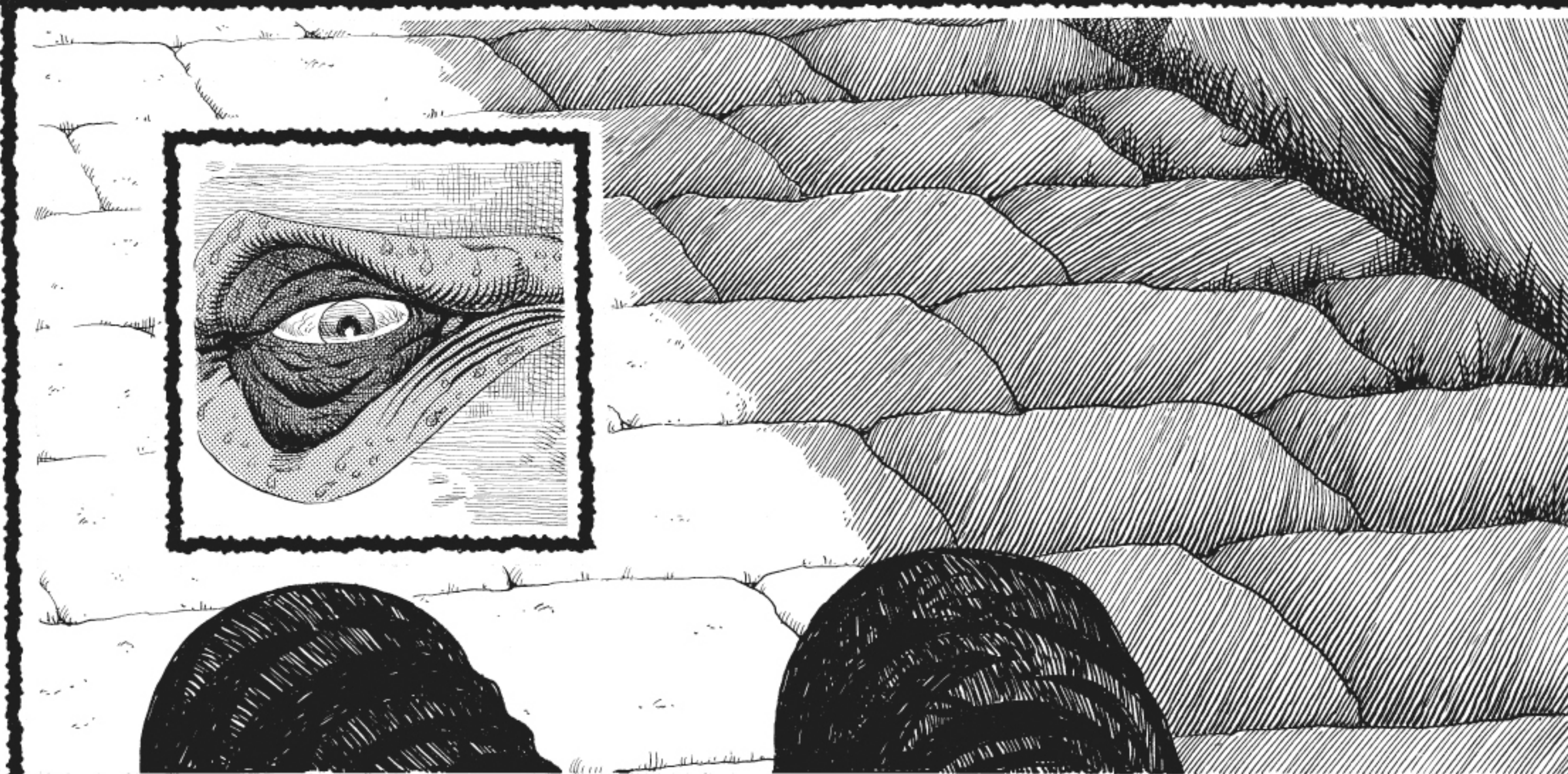
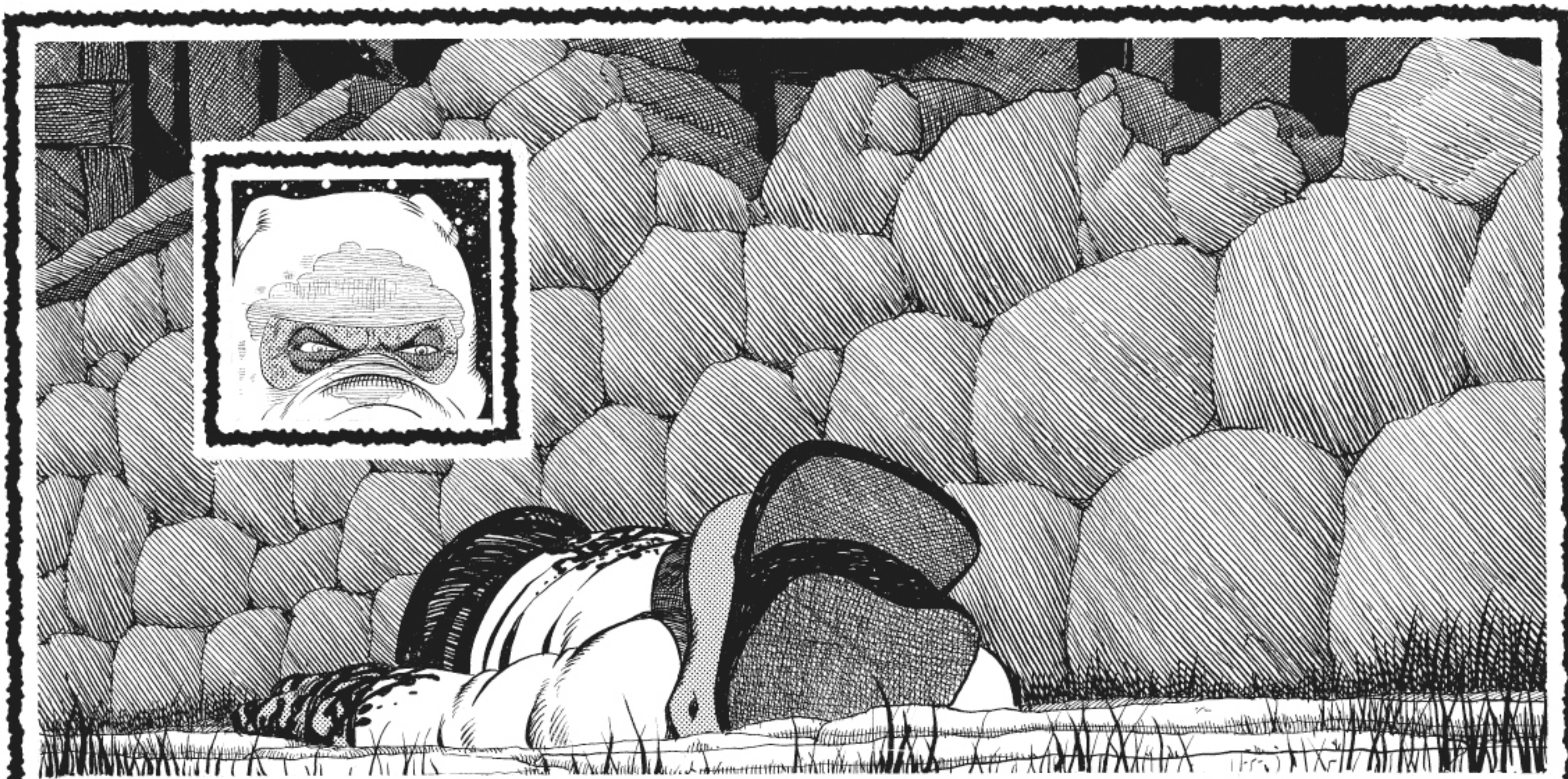


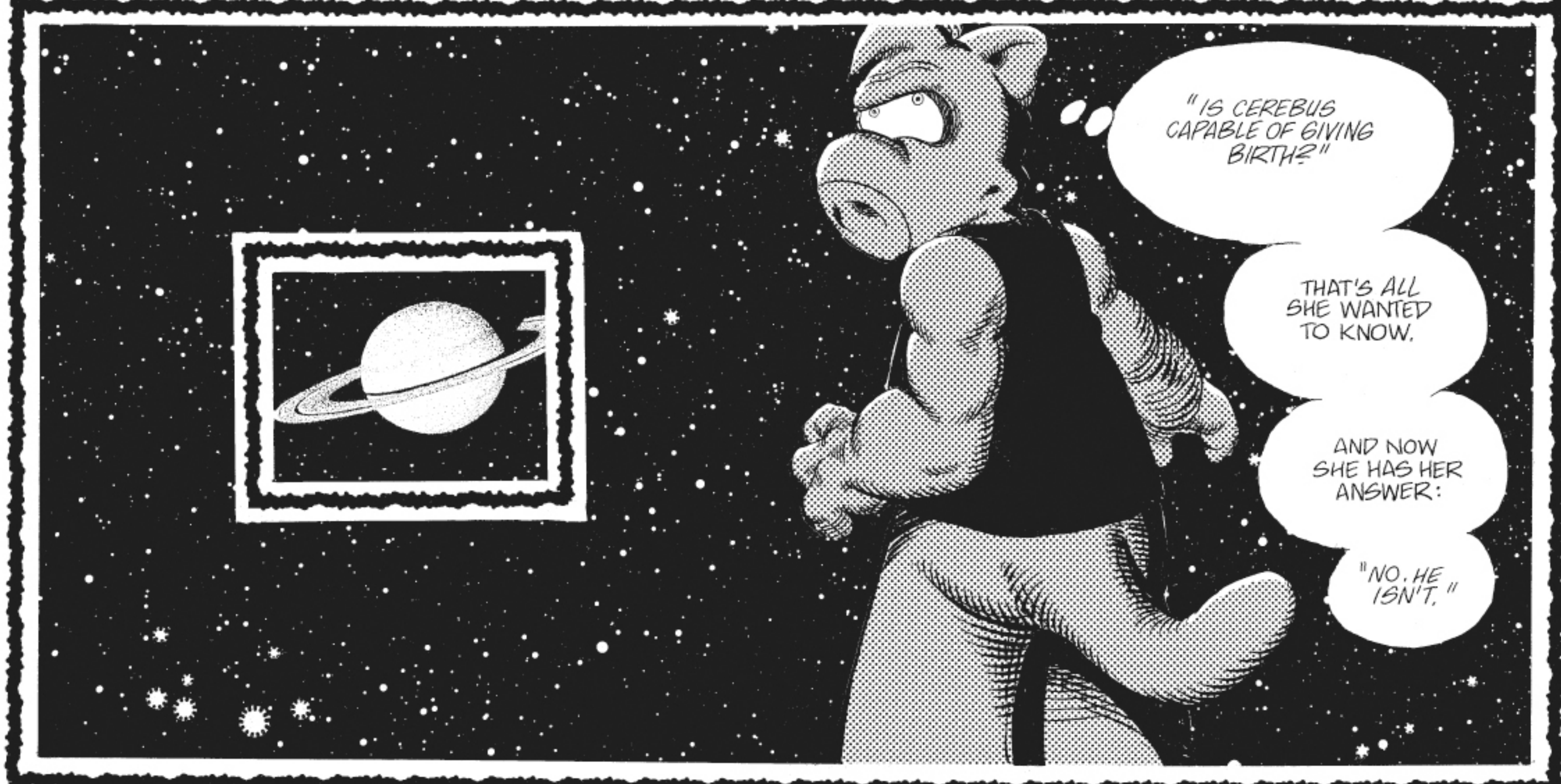
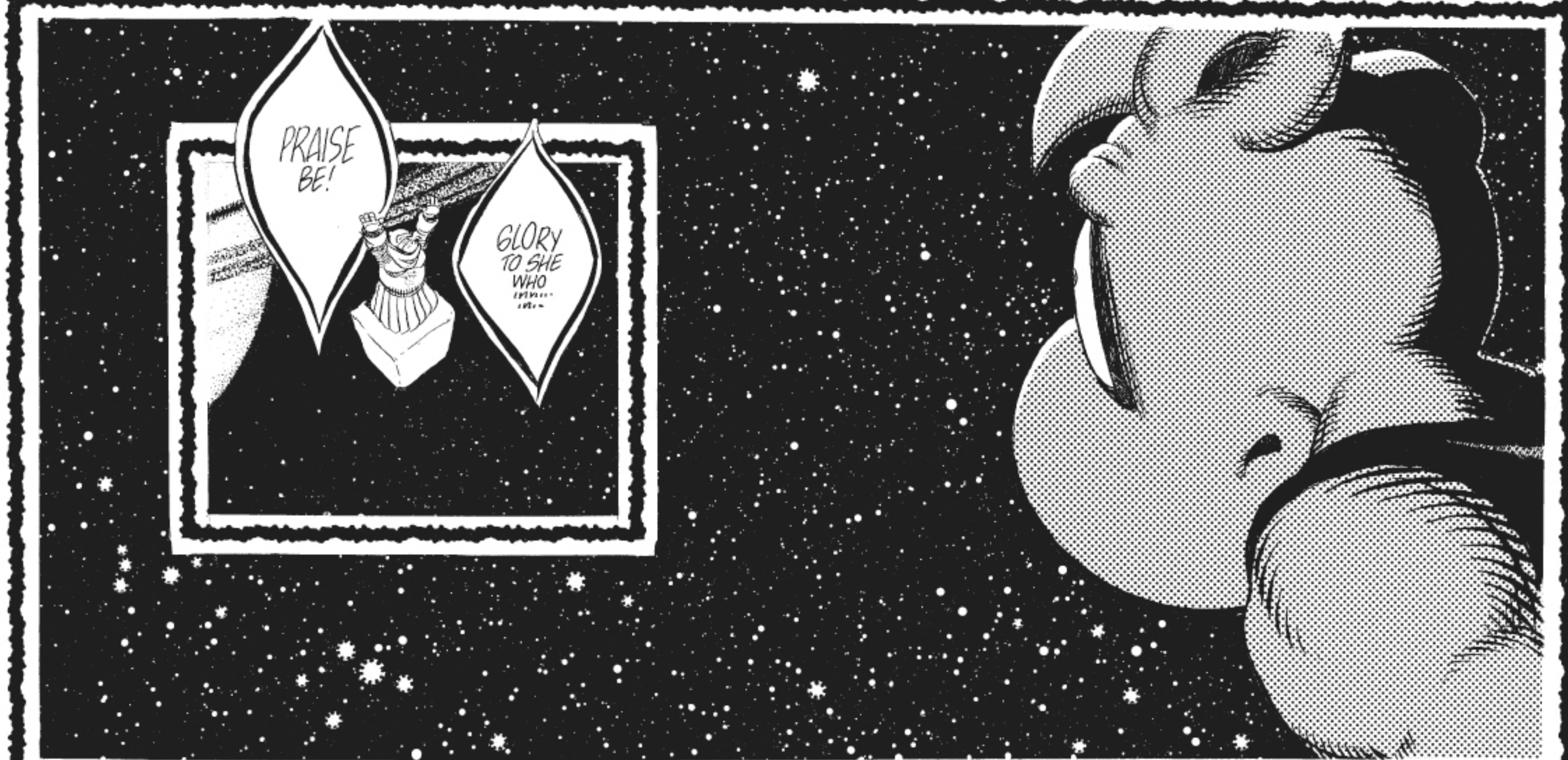
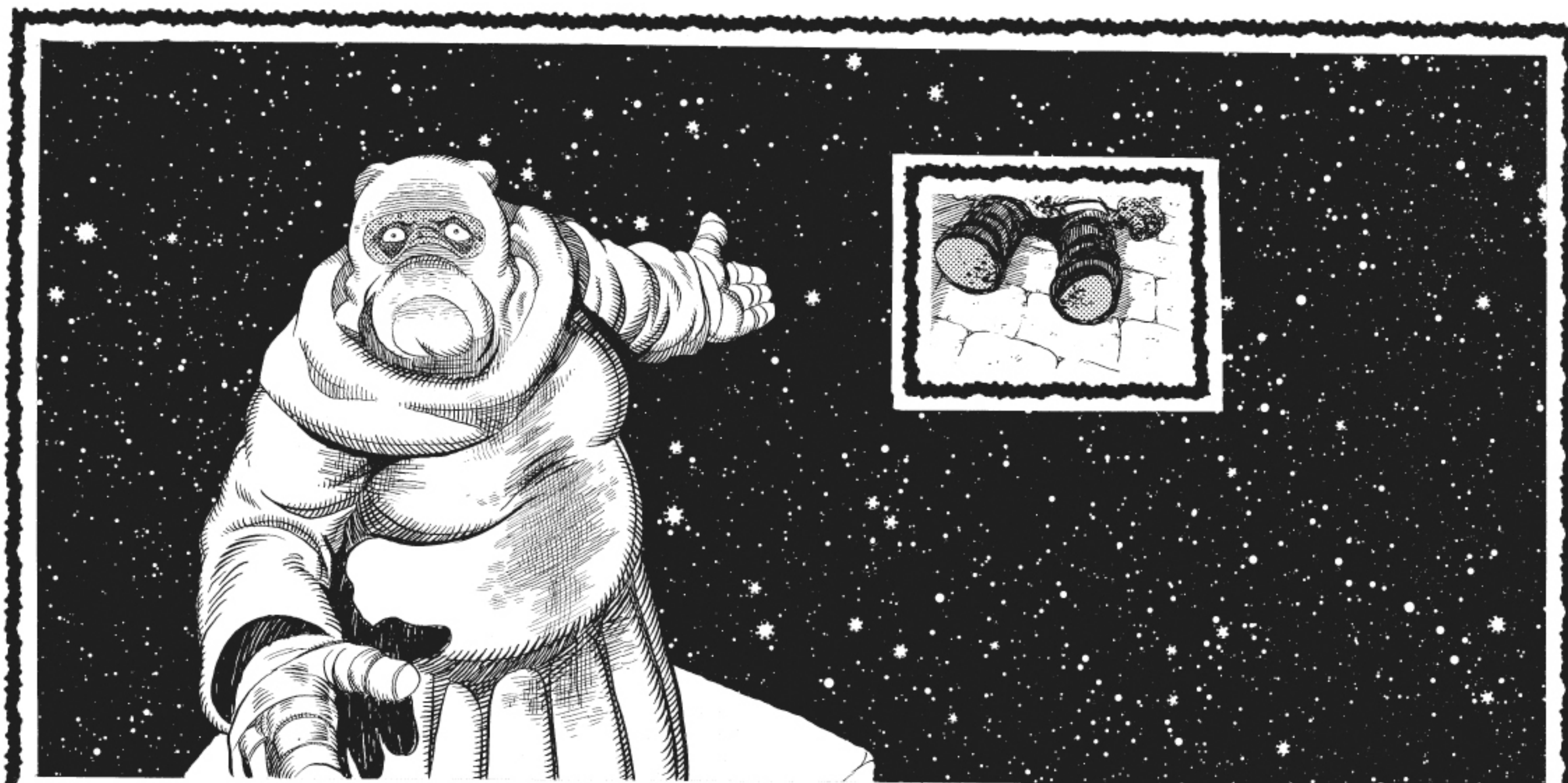
OH,
HELL

LET ME
TAKE CARE
OF THAT
RIGHT NOW.









NOW THAT SHE
KNOWS YOU CAN'T
BE A MOTHER, YOU
NO LONGER EXIST
AS FAR AS SHE'S
CONCERNED...

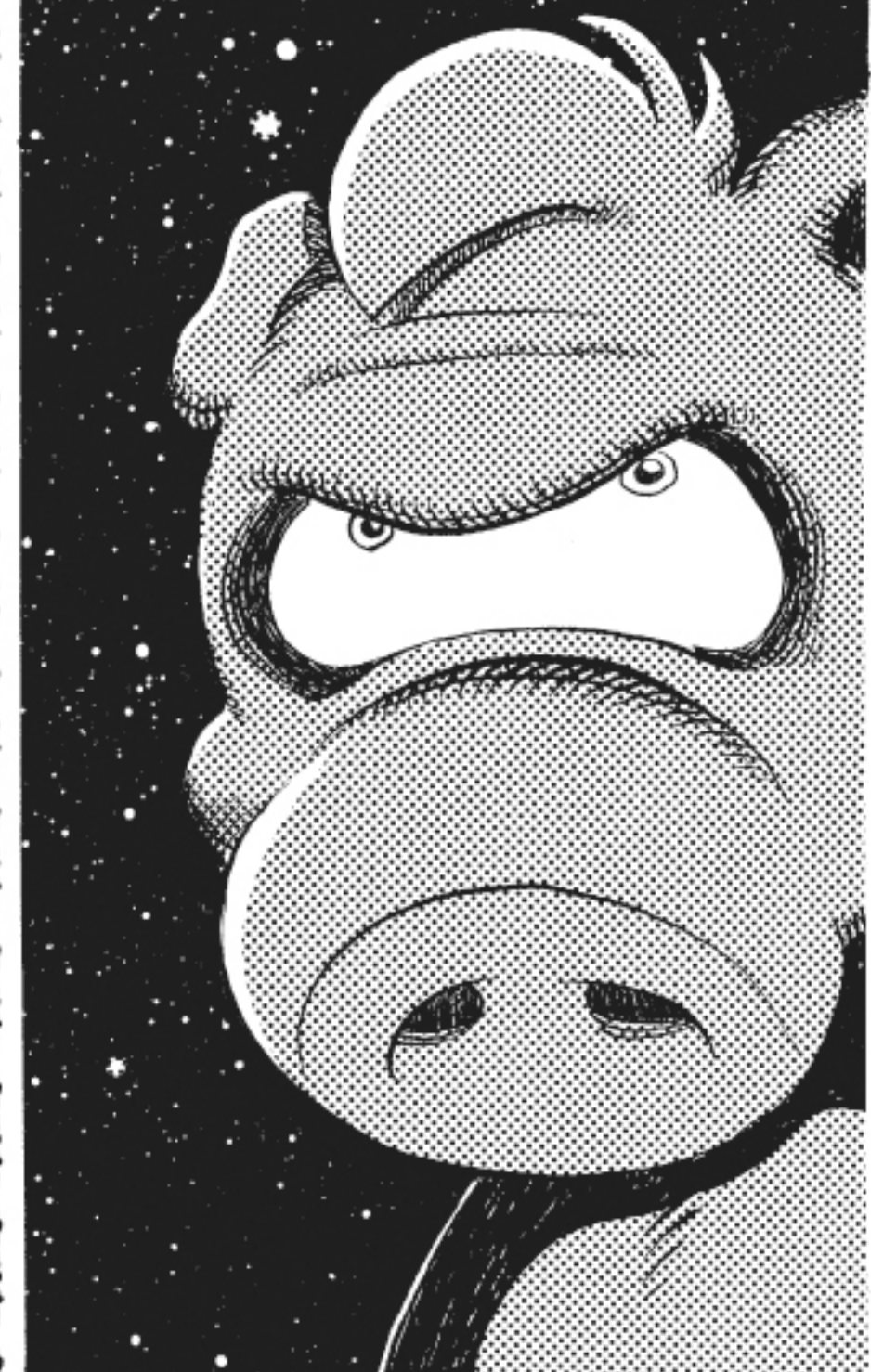


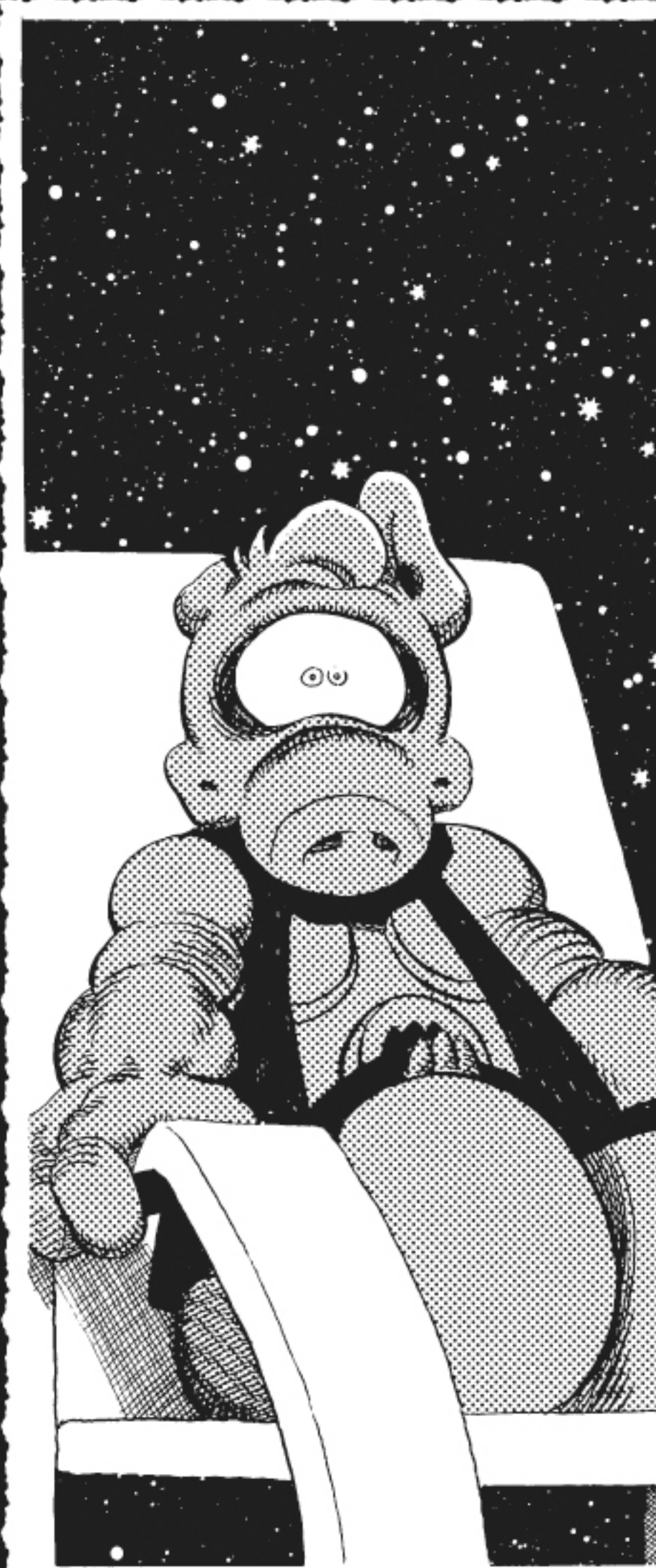
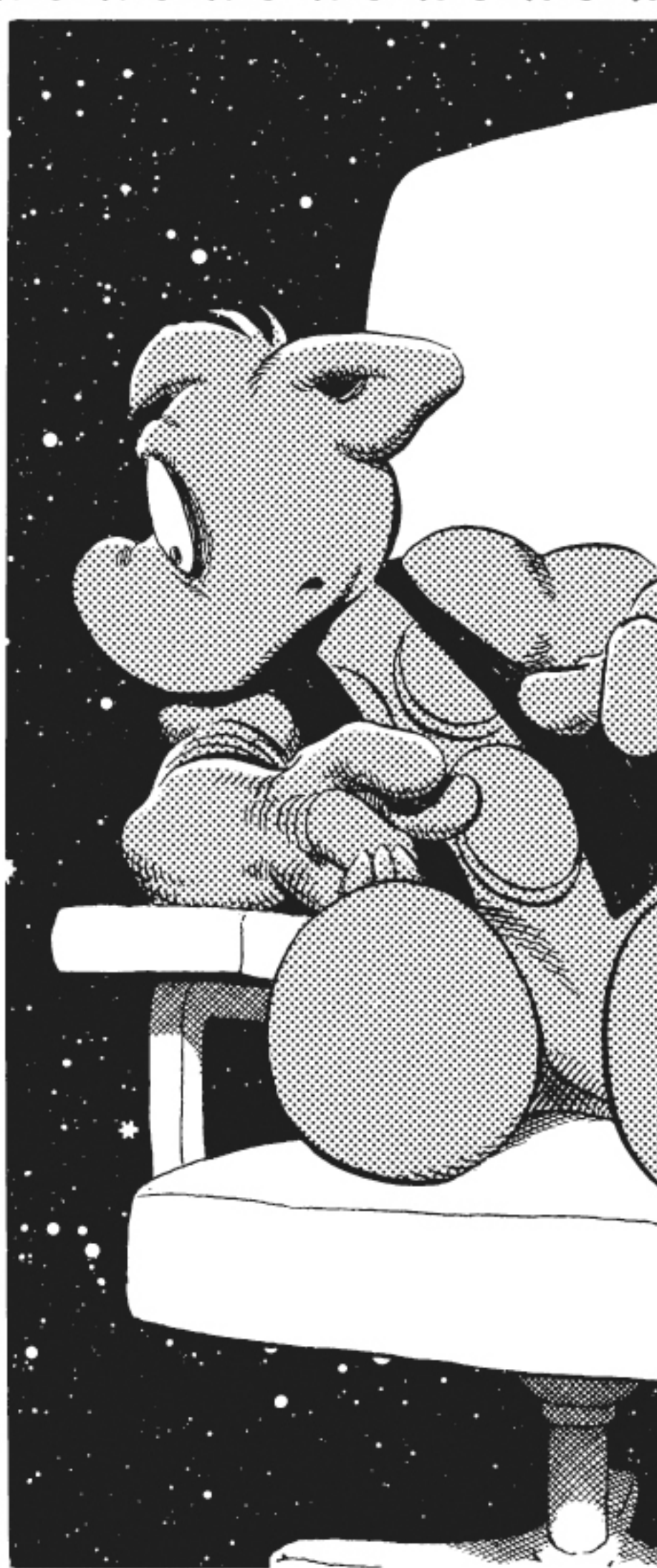
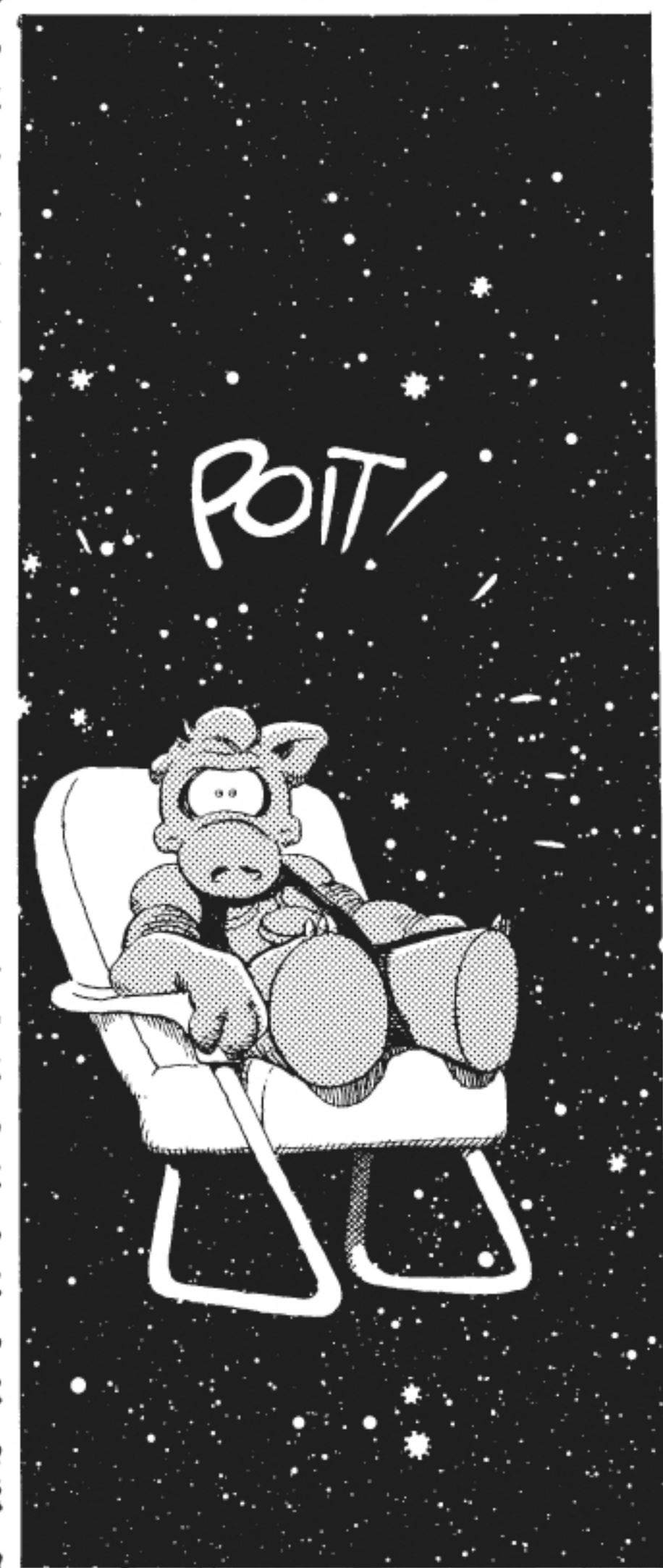
SO...uh
THAT'S
IT.

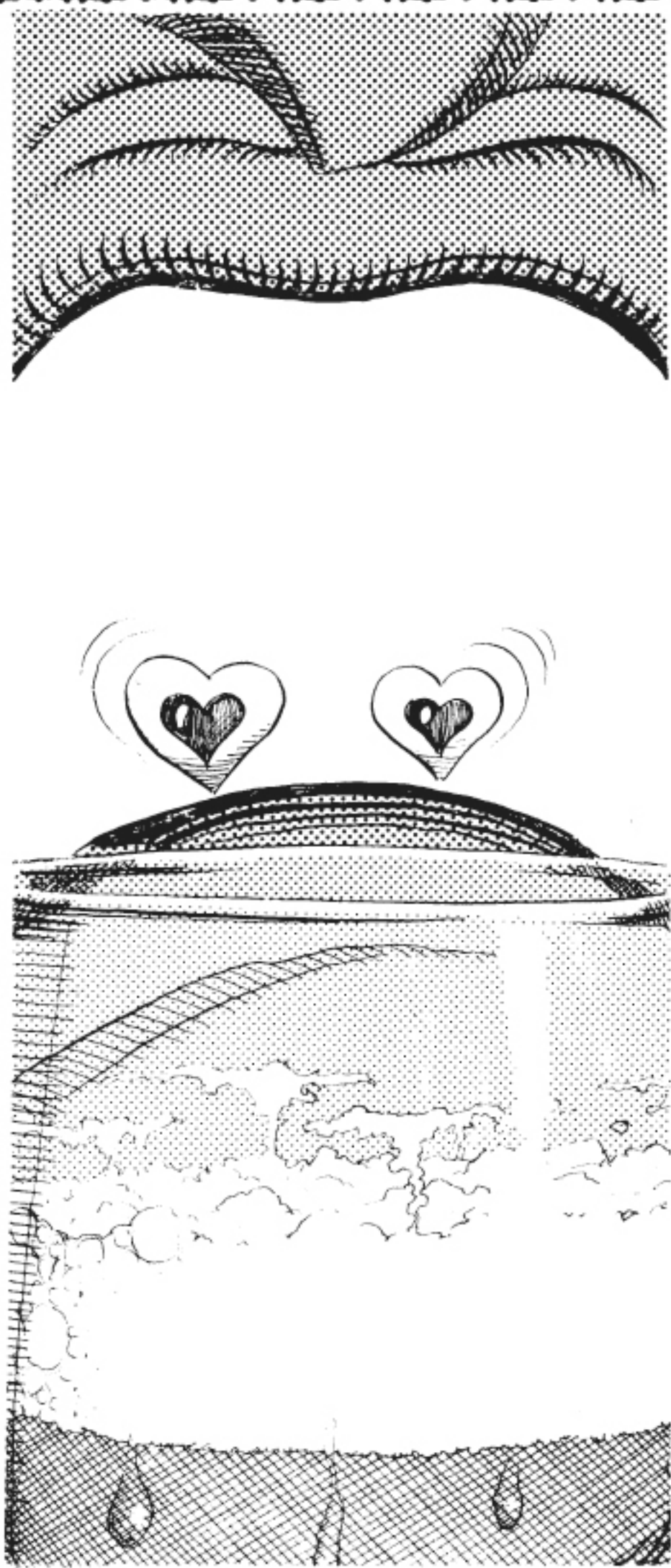
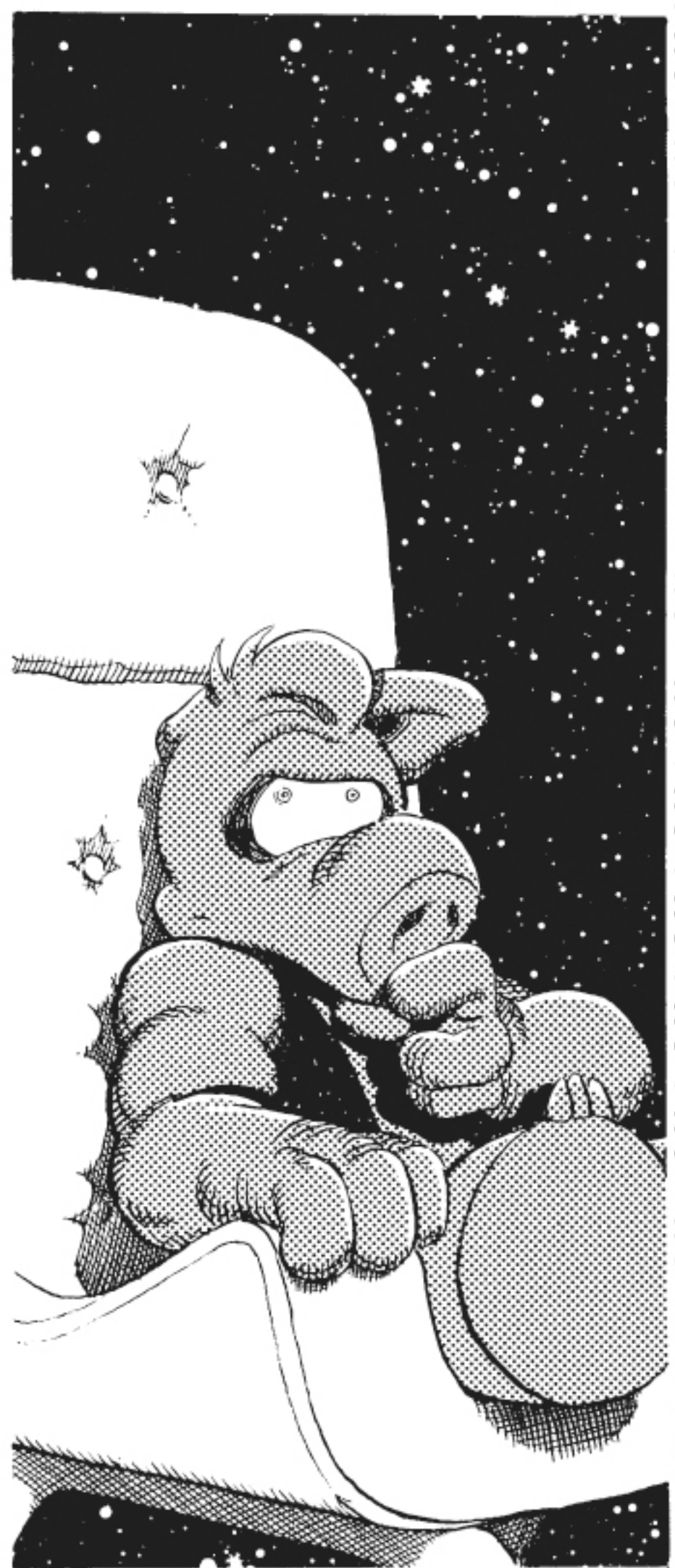
I'M ALL
DONE,



YOUR
TURN.

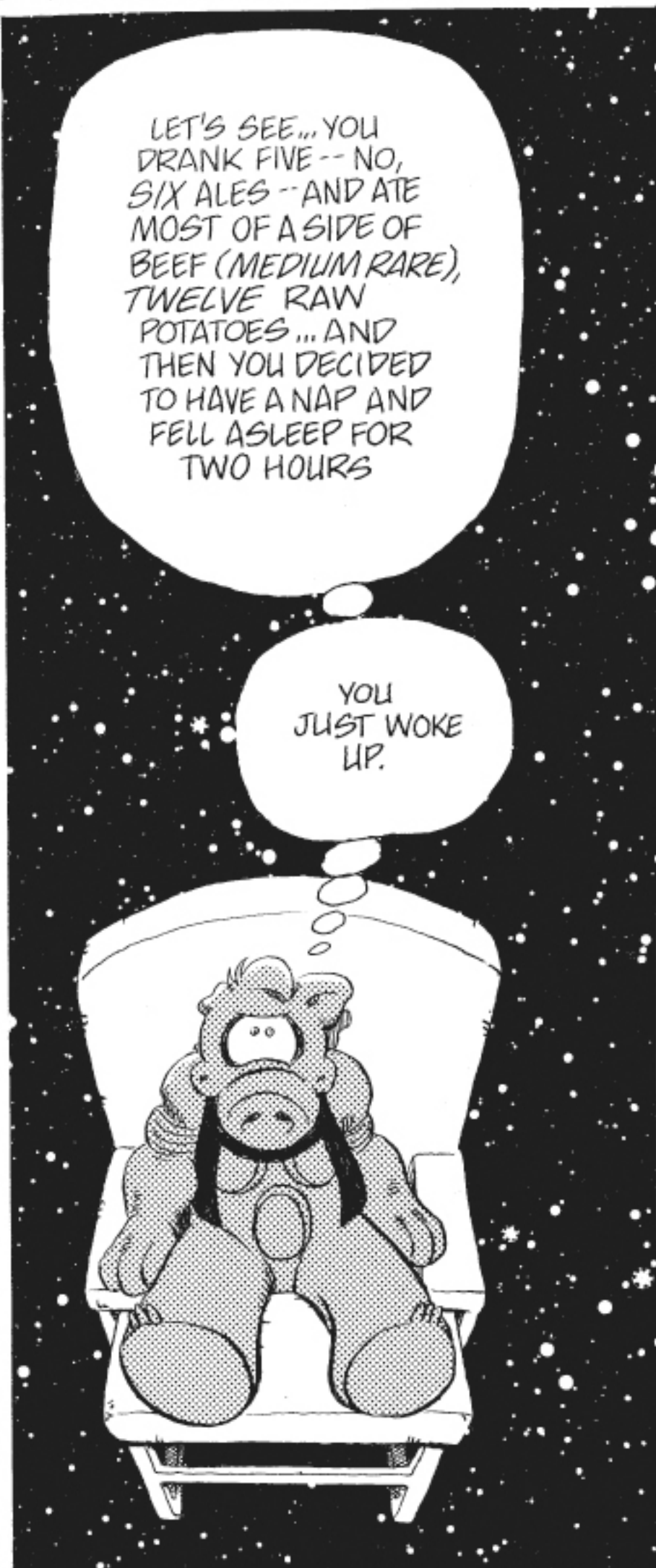








BAN



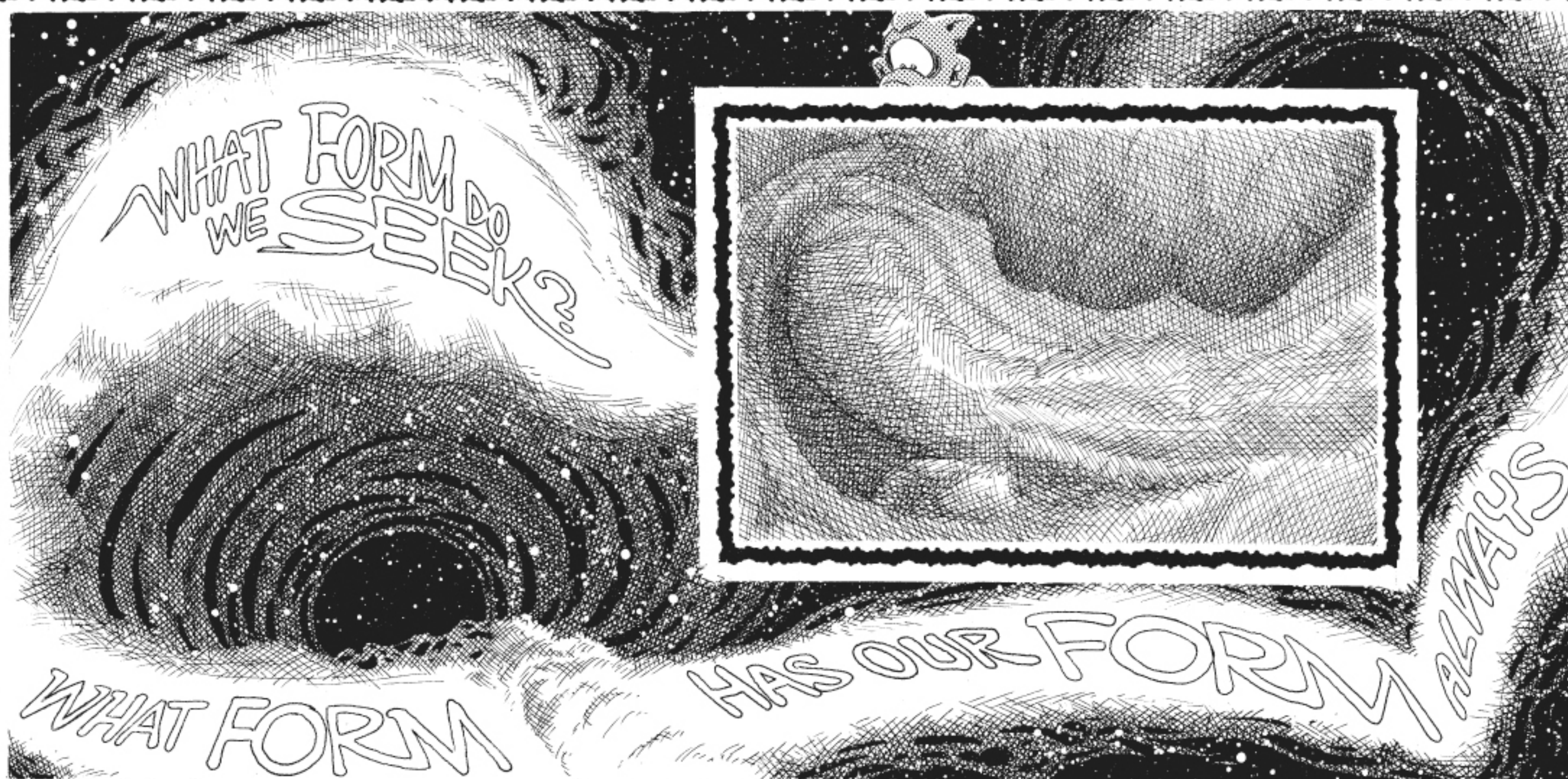


TO ANSWER THAT,
I HAVE TO TAKE YOU
BACK A THOUSAND YEARS
TO A MEDITATION CHAMBER
BENEATH THE RED
MARCHES...

WHERE THE PIG'S
SHAMAN-KING COMMUNES
WITH HIS -- AND YOUR--
AARDVARKIAN ANCESTORS.

THE ROOM IS FILLED
WITH SMOKE, SWIRLING
ABOUT HIM, INFLAMING HIS
SENSES, TRANSFORMING
HIS REALITY...

BRINGING FORTH
THE QUESTION





OF COURSE, WHAT HE SAW, YOUR MUTUAL AARDVARKIAN ANCESTORS ALSO SAW. HE PREVAILED UPON HIS ARTISANS AND SCULPTORS TO RENDER YOUR IMAGE IN EVERY IMAGINABLE MEDIUM.

THOUGH NOT ALL OF THE PIGTS BELIEVED IN THE PROPHECY OF YOUR COMING, ENOUGH DID

TO MAINTAIN THAT BELIEF FOR A PERIOD OF TIME

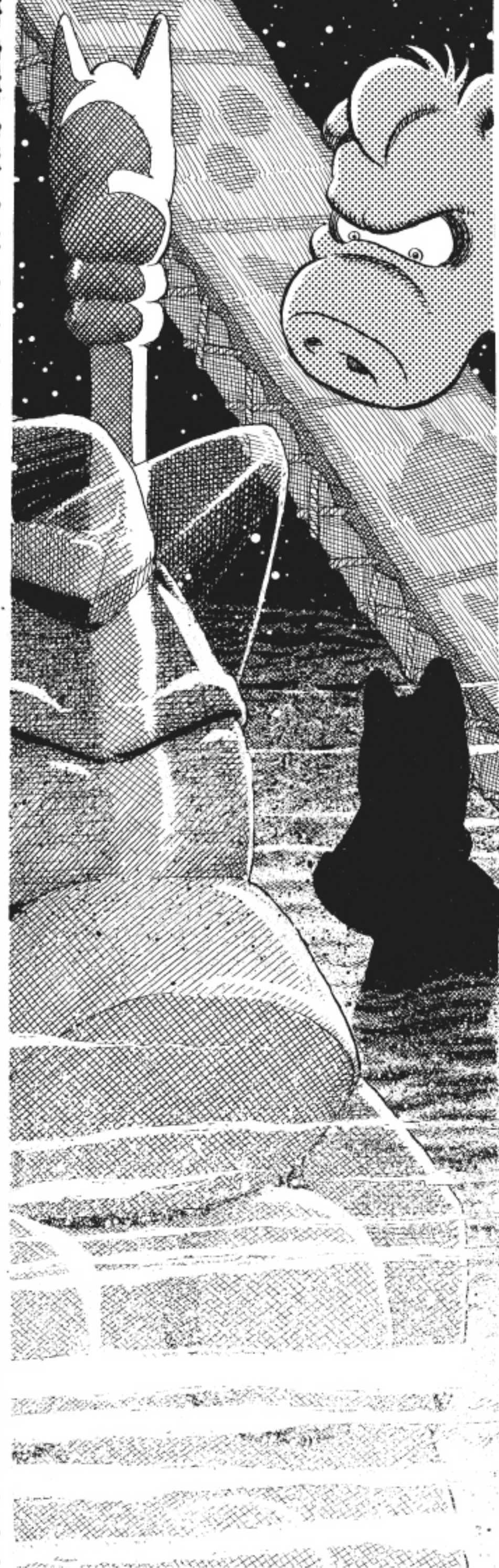
THOUGH NOT ALL OF THE AARDVARKIAN ANCESTORS BELIEVED YOUR FORM TO BE THE IDEAL (OF WHICH THEY THEMSELVES HAD BEEN FLAWED MANIFESTATIONS) ENOUGH DID...

TO IMBUE THE ICONS WITH THEIR COLLECTIVE SPIRIT, PROVIDING FOCUS FOR THE BELIEFS OF GENERATIONS OF PIGTS.

HOWEVER, BELIEF BEGAN TO WAVER. DOUBT BEGAN TO SPREAD. THE SHAMAN-KING CRAFTED MEDALLIONS, A HELMET AND A SHORT SWORD OF HARD, GRAY METAL...

HE CALLED HIS PEOPLE TO HIM WITHOUT FIRST COMMUNING WITH HIS ANCESTORS.

"THESE WILL BE HIS," HE TOLD THEM.



"THESE WILL BE
HIS" HE BELLOWED
TO THE HEAVENS.

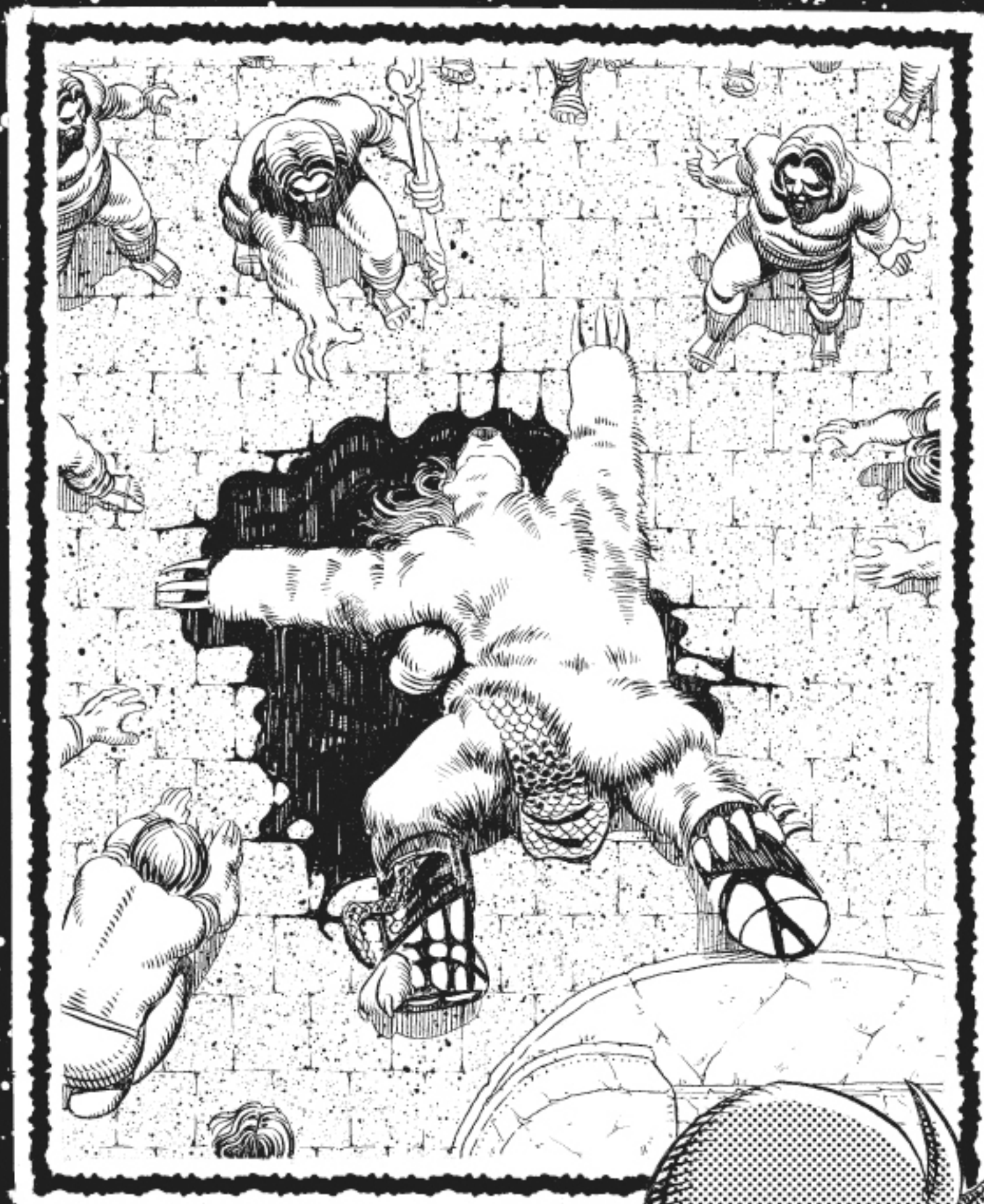
THE GROUND
SHOOK WITH THE
LOUDEST
THUNDER.

HE TOOK
UP THE SHORT
GRAY SWORD.

AND PLUNGED
IT -- UP TO THE
HILT -- INTO HIS
LEFT BREAST

BLOOD
SPILLED OVER
THE HELMET
AND THE
MEDALLIONS.

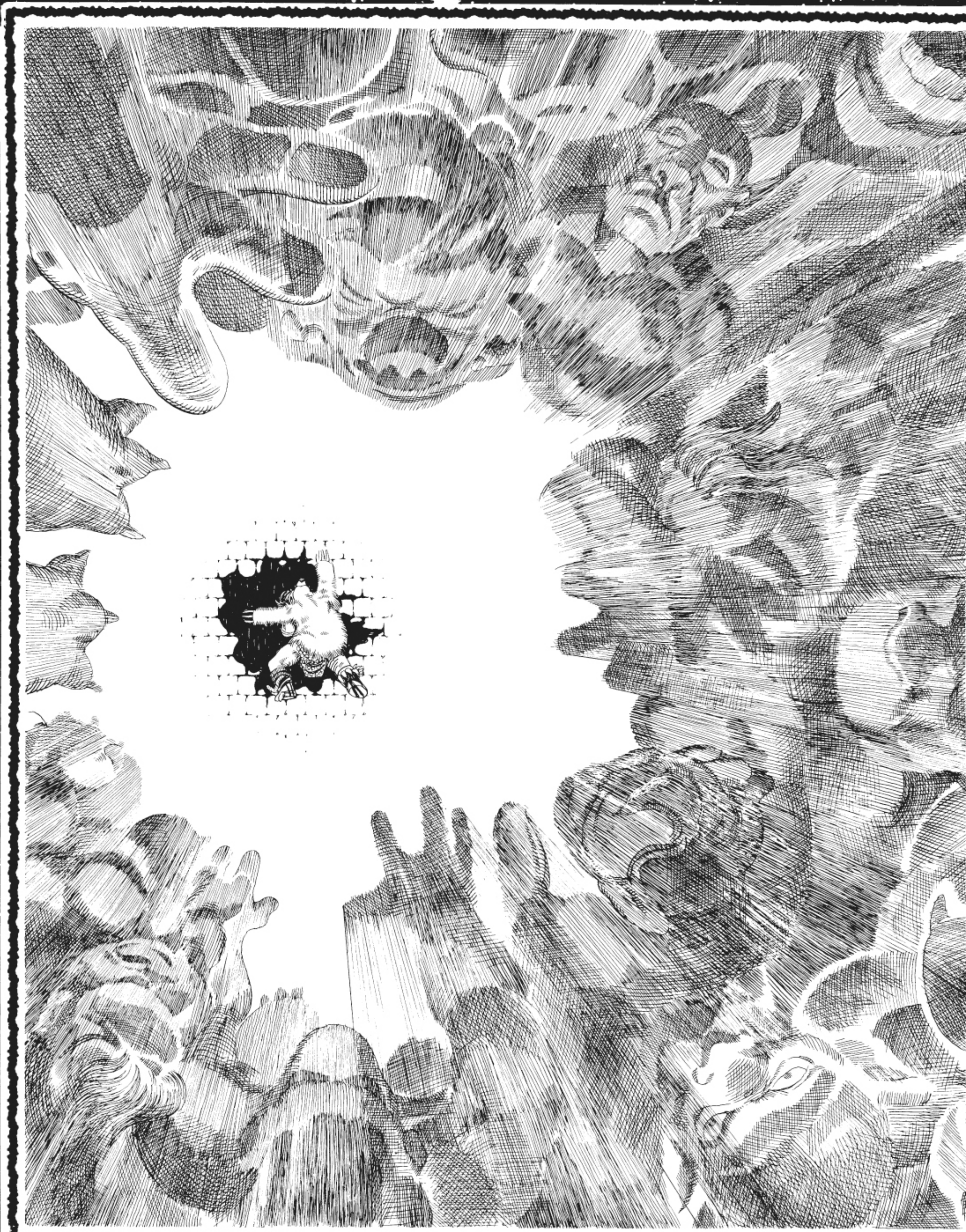
HE GATHERED
THEM TO HIM
AS HE SLUMPED
FORWARD INTO THE
WIDENING CRIMSON
POOL.



IT GAVE
EVERYBODY
QUITE A
SHOCK









EVERYBODY

QUITE A
SHOCK.

SUICIDE KILLS NOT ONLY THE *BODY* BUT THE *SOUL* AS WELL -- LEAVING THE AARDVARKIAN ANCESTORS TO WONDER IF THE SHAMAN-KING'S FINAL GESTURE HAD BEEN ONE OF PROFOUND BRAVERY OR EXTREME COWARDICE, A PROTRACTED CIVIL WAR BETWEEN PIGTISH TRIBES MIRRORS THIS CONFLICT

MUCH BLOOD IS SPILLED OVER THE CENTURIES AS ONE FACTION AND ANOTHER CLAIMS POSSESSION OF THE SHAMAN-KING'S REMAINS, THE HELMET, THE SWORD AND THE MEDALLIONS... SOON THESE ARTIFACTS ARE LOST AND CONSIDERED MYTHICAL

WHICH IS PERHAPS WHAT THE SHAMAN-KING HAD INTENDED,

A FACTION OF THE PIGTS WENT UNDERGROUND -- LITERALLY -- AND KEPT ALIVE THE ICON OF "HE WHO IS TO COME AFTER"

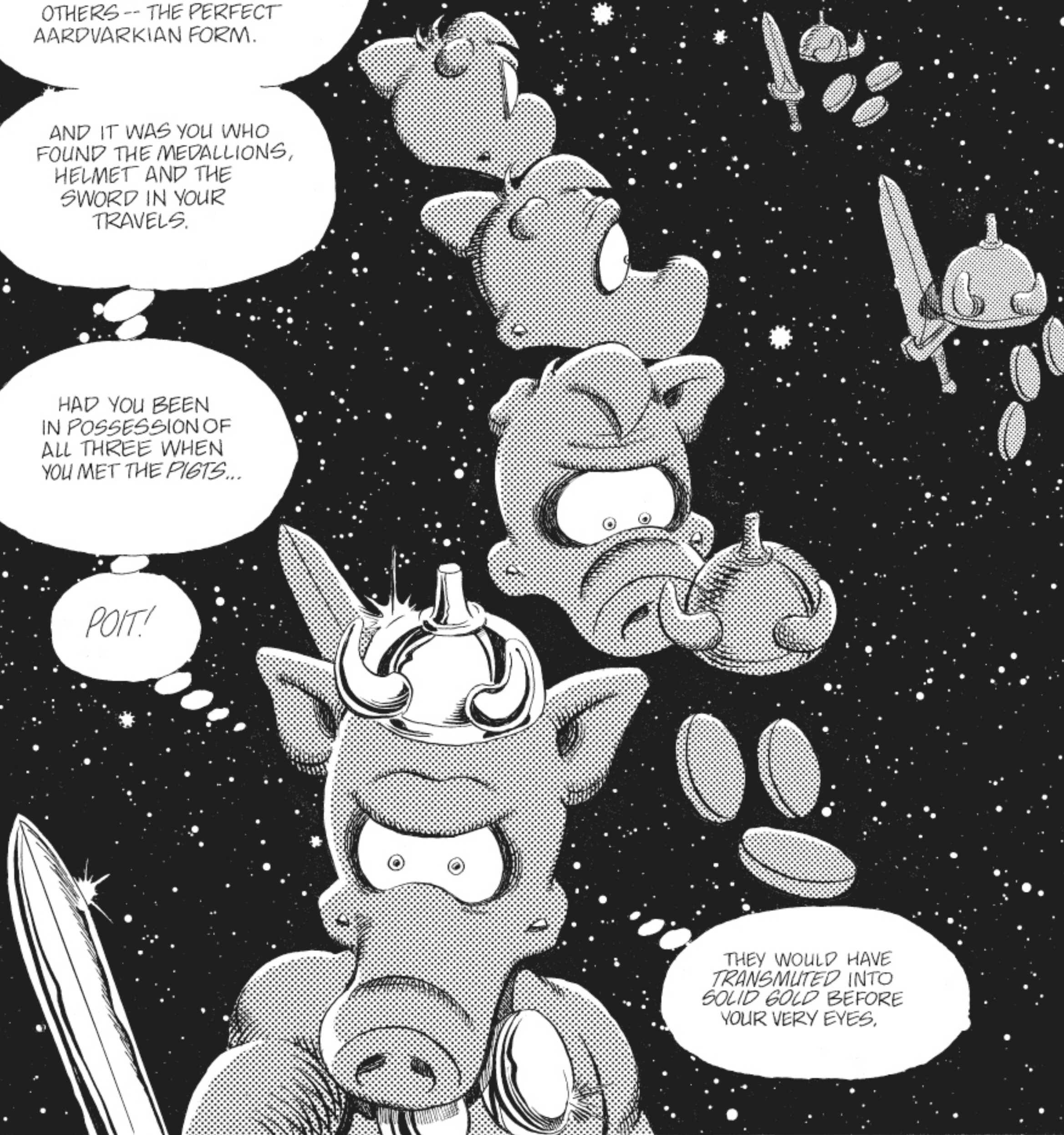
THEY WERE PROTECTED BY THE SPIRITS OF THOSE ANCESTORS WHO BELIEVED IN THAT ICON ABOVE ALL OTHERS -- THE PERFECT AARDVARKIAN FORM.

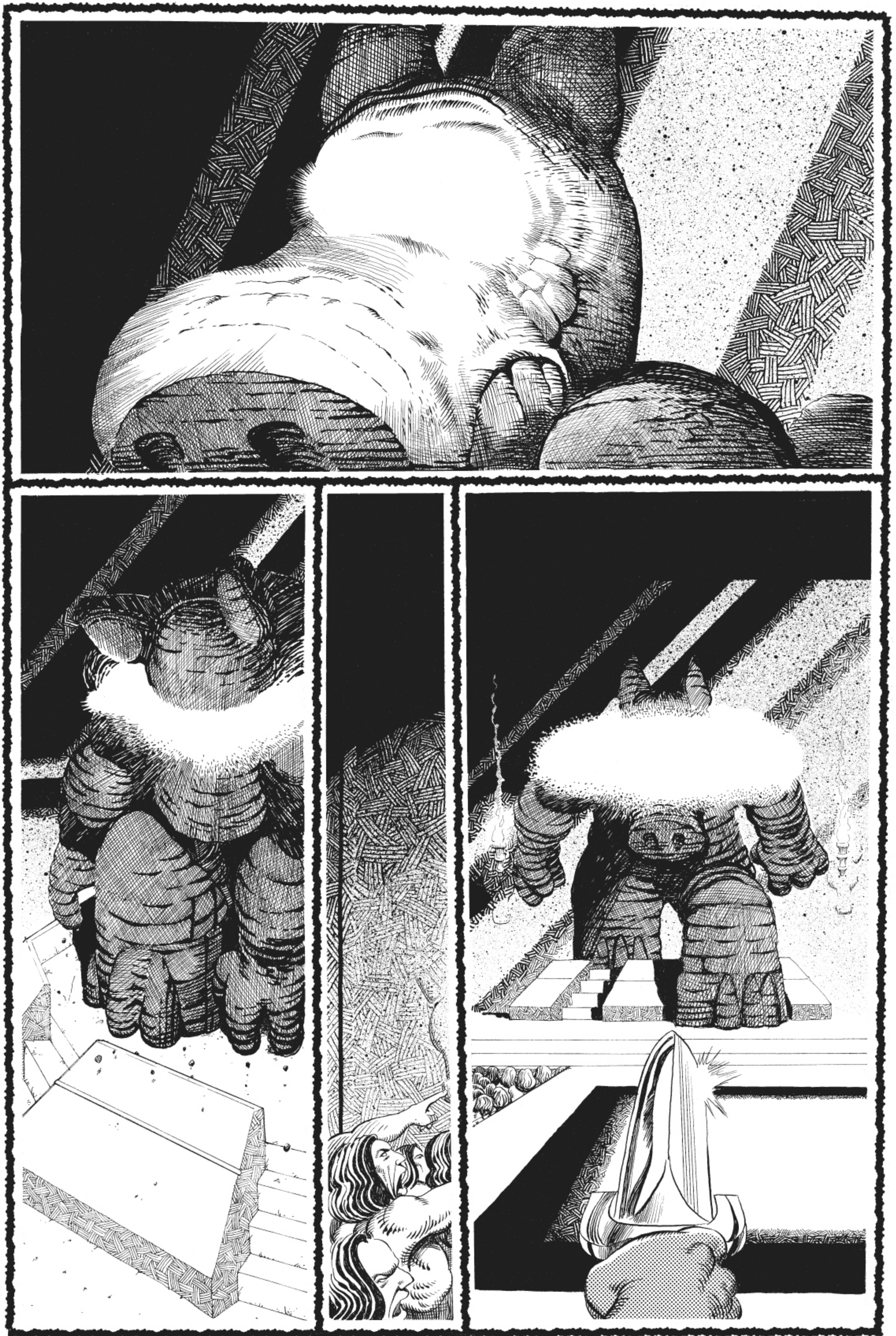
AND IT WAS YOU WHO FOUND THE MEDALLIONS, HELMET AND THE SWORD IN YOUR TRAVELS.

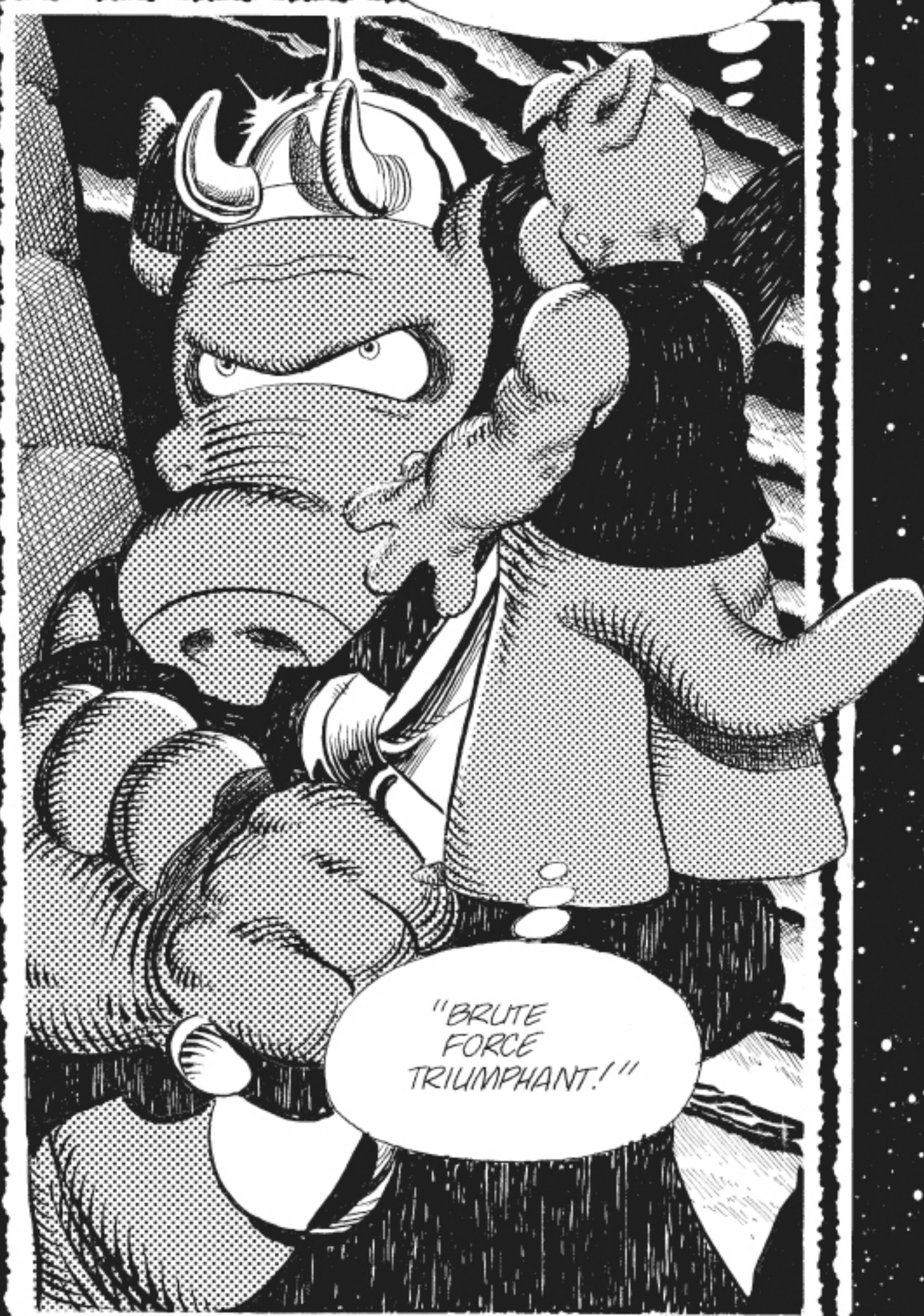
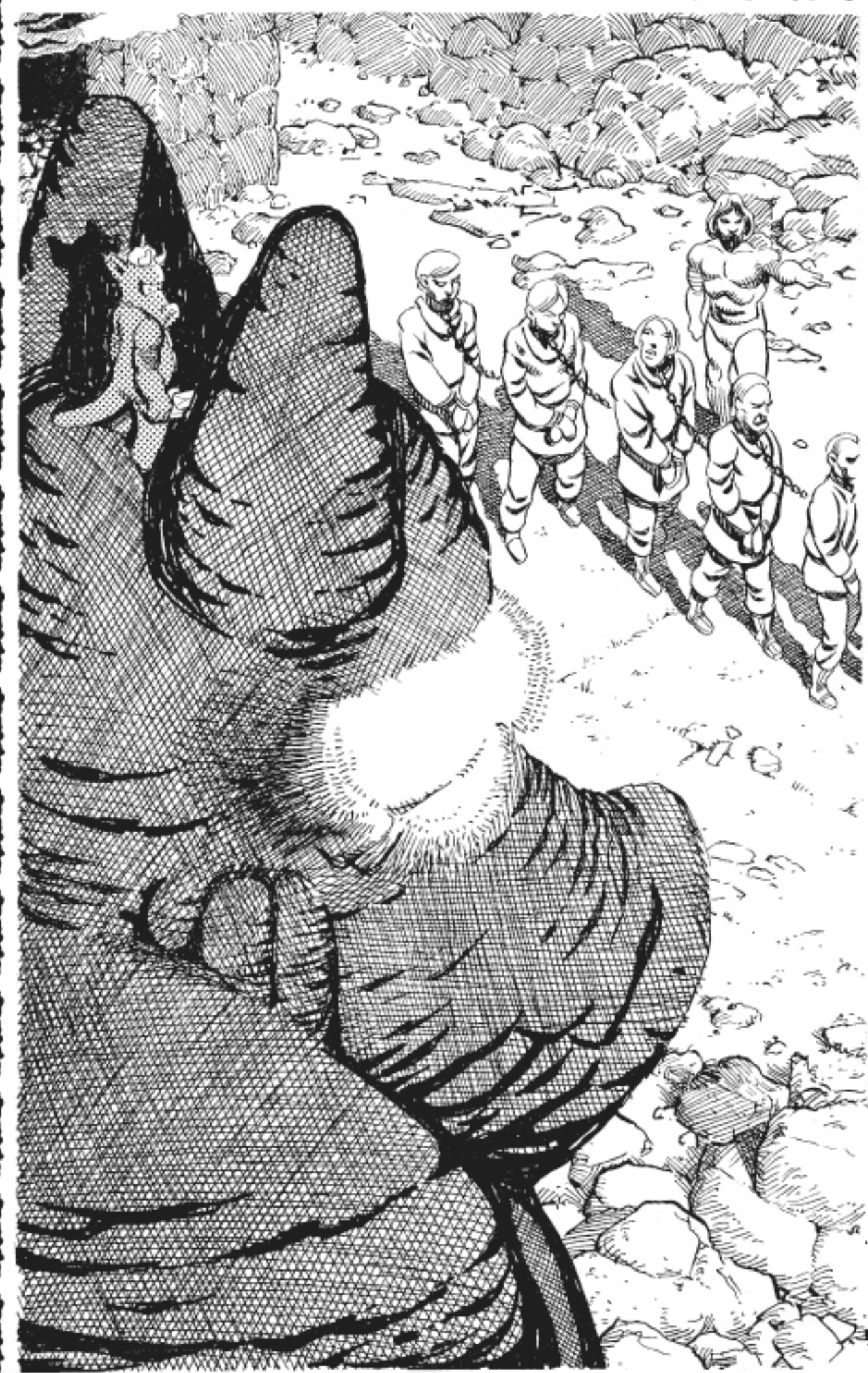
HAD YOU BEEN IN POSSESSION OF ALL THREE WHEN YOU MET THE PIGTS...

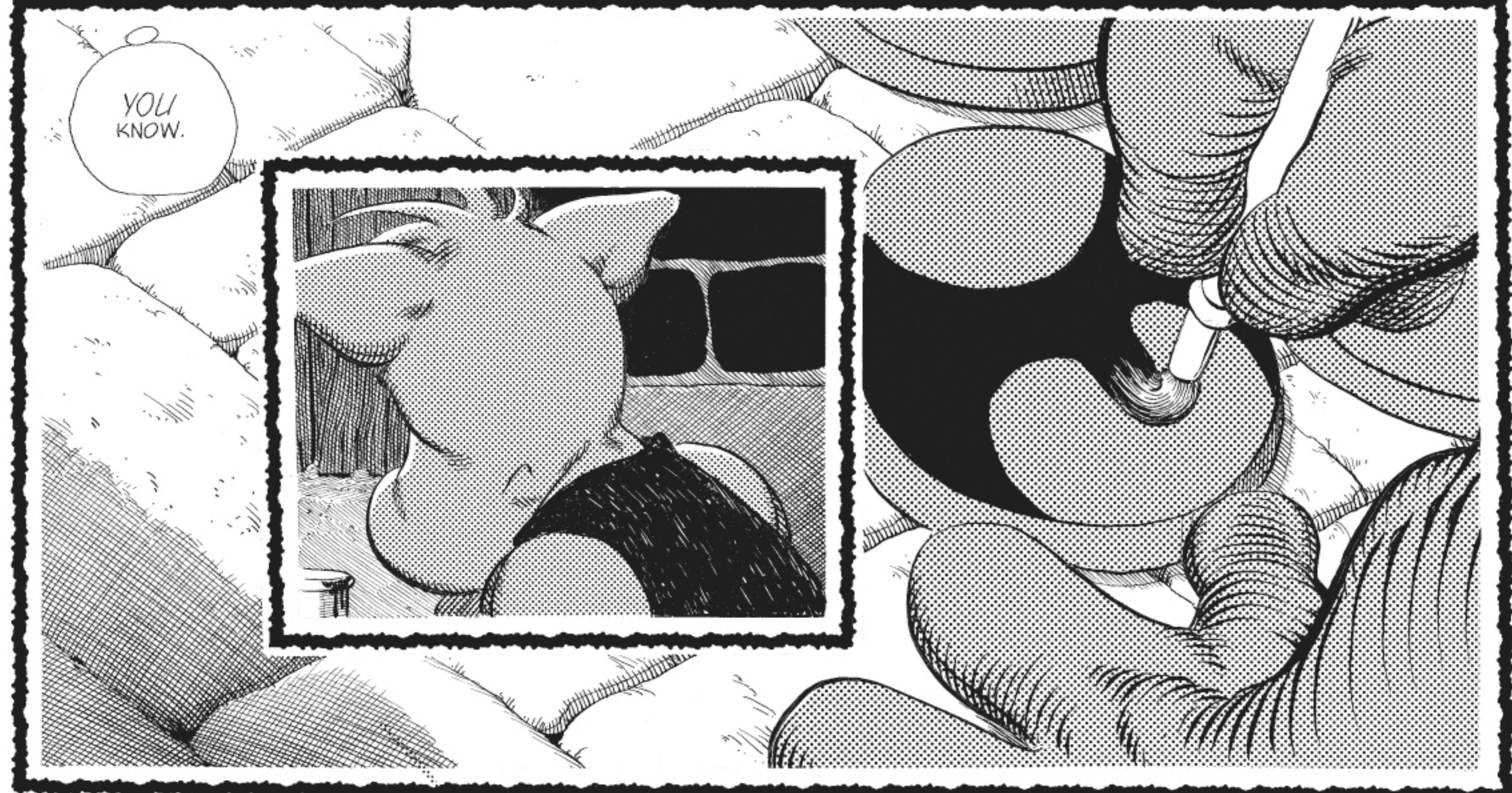
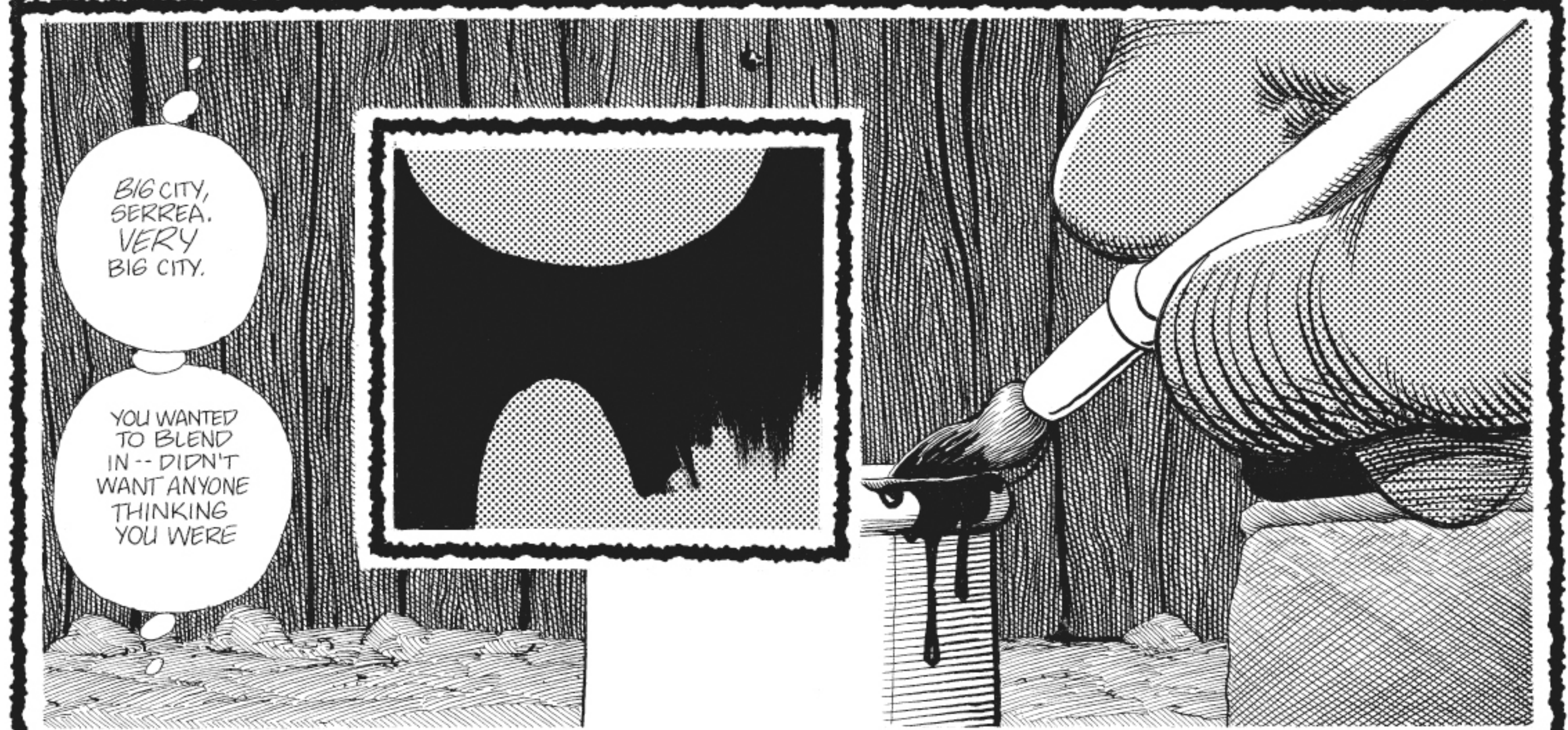
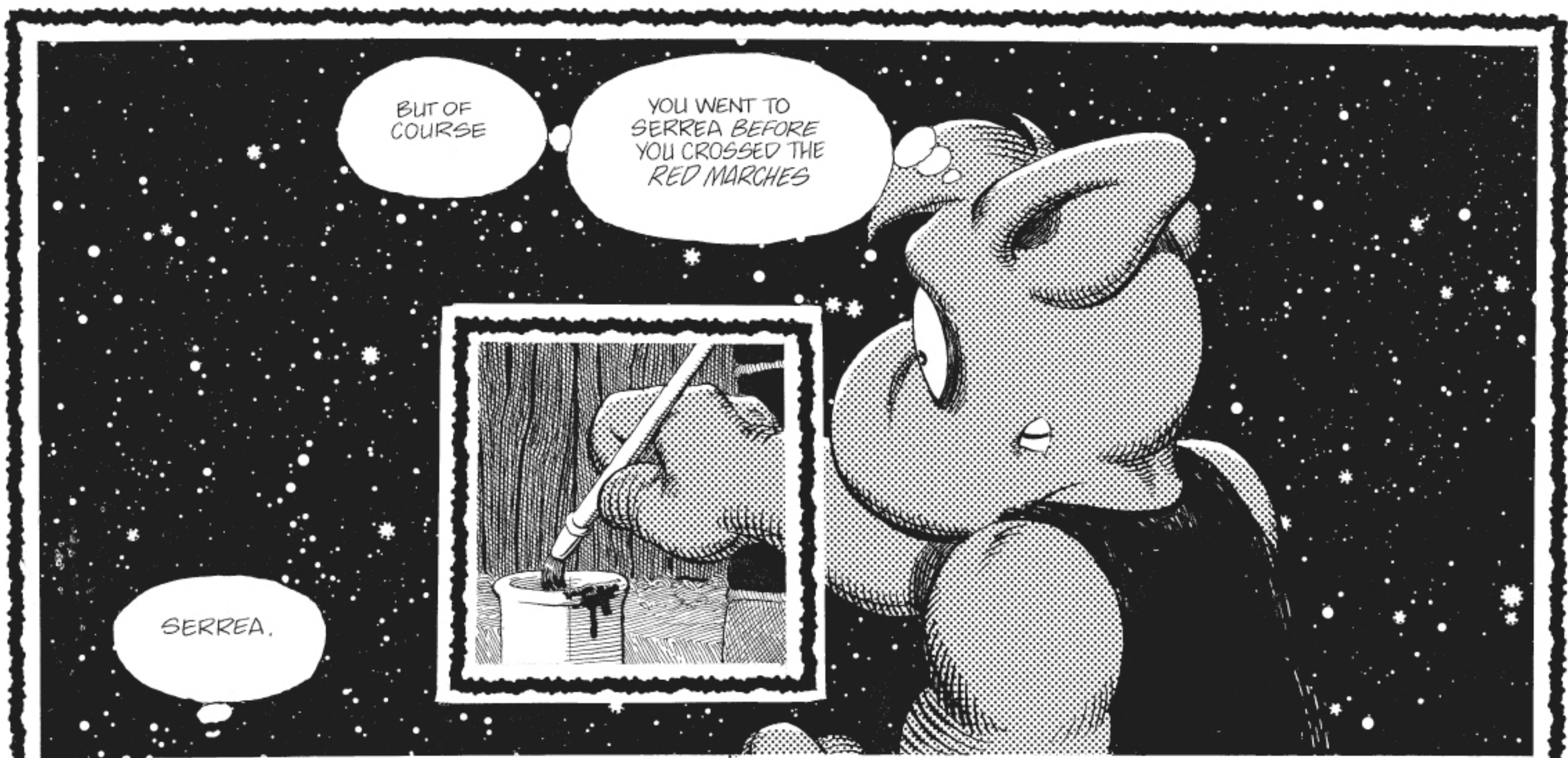
POIT!

THEY WOULD HAVE TRANSMUTED INTO SOLID GOLD BEFORE YOUR VERY EYES,









AYE--"A STUPID
NORTHERN
BARBARIAN"

SO YOU TRADED THE
HELMET FOR A BLACK
VEST, A BOTTLE OF
BLACK PAINT AND
A PAINTBRUSH

THEN YOU CROUCHED
IN AN ALLEYWAY--
CAREFULLY PAINTING
THE MEDALLIONS
WITH THE MERCHANT
GUILD SYMBOL
""

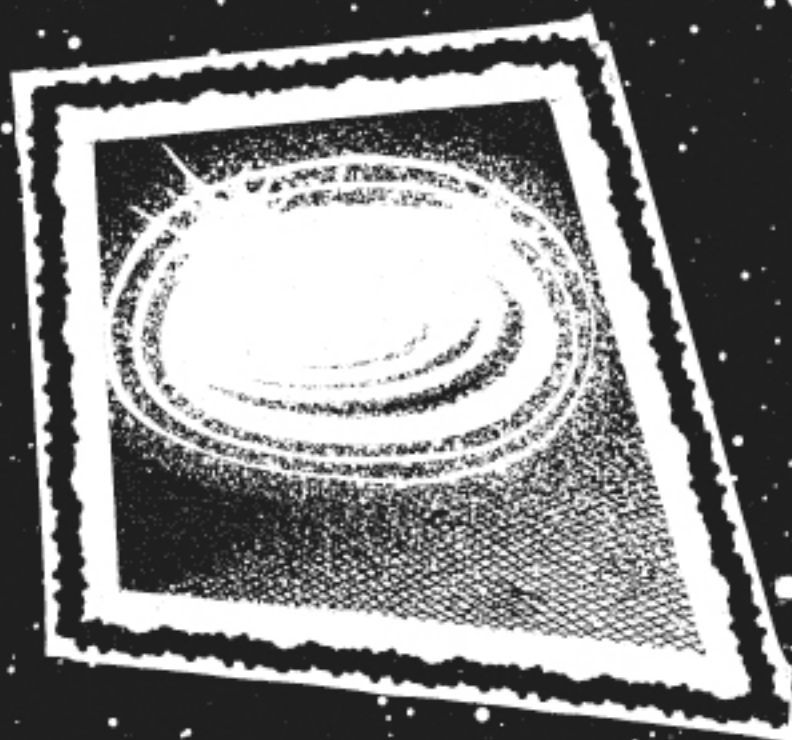
AYE.

NO HELMET--?
NO FULFILLMENT
OF THE PROPHECY

THE ALLEY WAS
CALLED DOAR CLOSE,
AS IN, "THE DOOR
HAS CLOSED"

LIKE A TAUT ROPE
SNAPPING, YOUR ACTION--
GETTING RID OF THE
HELMET-- UNLEASHES A
WAVE OF CHAOTIC
MANIFESTATIONS:

"THE CHAOS
GEM"





"THE CRAWLER"--
MISSHAPEN AND
RAVENOUS-- A
MANIFESTATION OF
THE AIMLESS, PLODDING
FUTURE BEFORE YOU

THE "LAST
RULER OF A DYING
RACE"-- A
BUMBLING, YET
ARROGANT
BLUFFOON.

A MANIFESTATION OF
YOUR SELF-DECEPTION,
INCOMPETENCE AND
BLUSTER

TURG, THE IGNORANT
NORTHERN BARBARIAN
YOU WOULD ALWAYS BE.

"THE BROTHERS
OF THE BLACK
SUN"

A DISPLACED
TRIBE OF
HERETICAL
PIGTS...

THEIR INSIGNIA:
A STYLISED, INVERTED
AARDVARK HEAD

MANIFESTATION
OF YOUR DESTINY
TURNED UPSIDE-
DOWN.

SINCE CEREBUS WAS
COMPLETELY UNAWARE
OF THE "BOGUS DEATH"
MANIFESTATION, I
CAN'T SEE ANY GOOD
REASON TO BRING
THE MATTER UP, SO
I WON'T...



YOU ACQUIRE THE
"BLACK BLOSSOM LOTUS"--
MAGIC! A TALISMAN WHICH
MIGHT PARTLY REDEEM
THE LOSS OF THE HELMET

BUT YOUR INVERTED
DESTINY ASSERTS ITSELF
-- YOUR MERCHANT GUISE--
AND SO YOU SERVE
MERELY AS MAGIC'S CONDUIT
FROM MERCHANT...

...TO MERCHANT, YOU
REVEAL YOURSELF TO
YOUR ANCESTORS, THOUGH
NOT YOURSELF...

HE PORTRAYS TO
YOU A "HIGHER
NATURE"--RIDGING
THE WORLD OF MAGIC
IN THE NAME OF
STABILITY

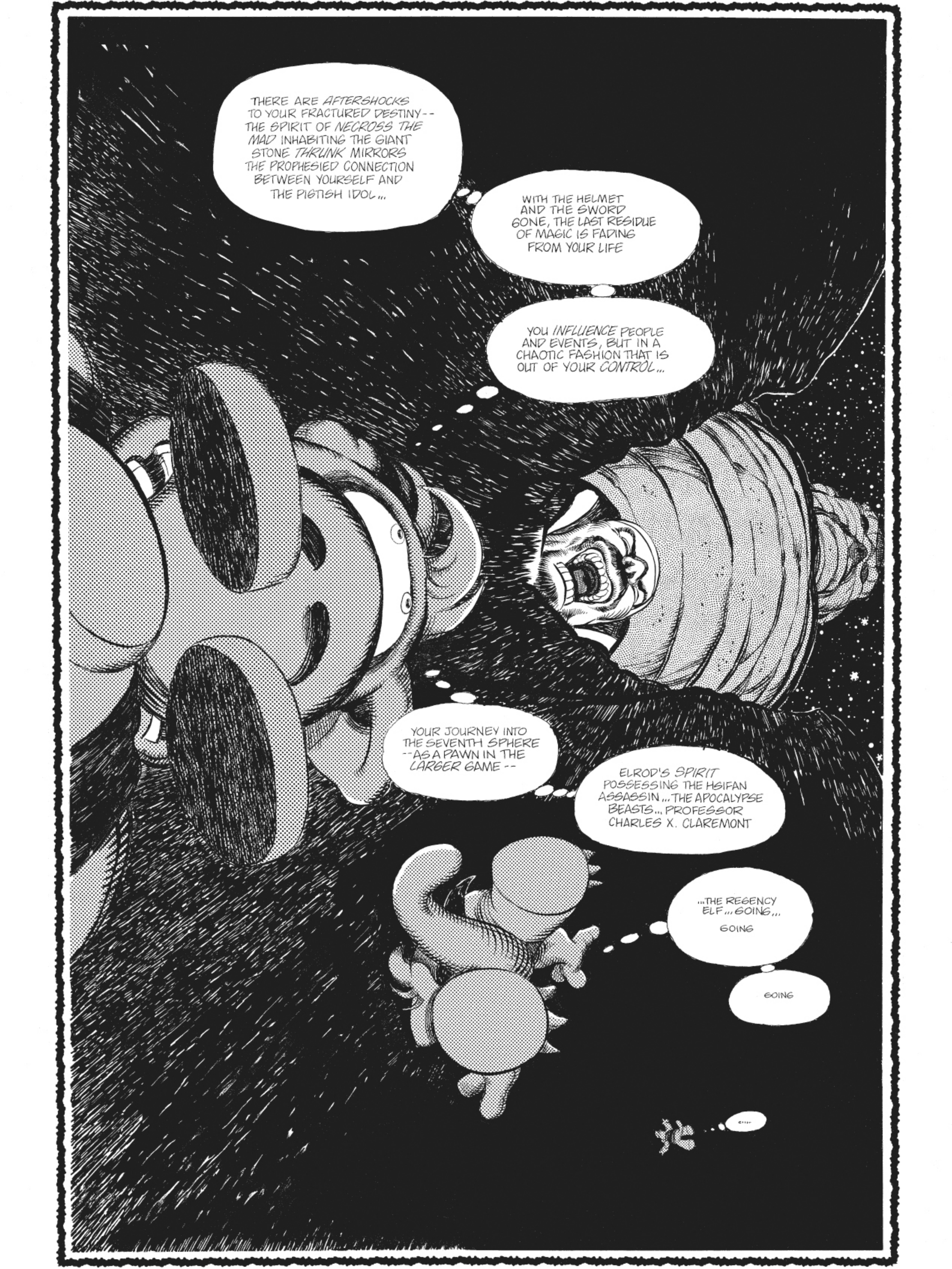
YOUR HIDDEN NATURE
IS REFLECTED IN THIS
SECOND MERCHANT

WHILE BENEATH THAT
FACADE IS A DECIDEDLY
UNSTABLE COCKROACH--
MINDLESSLY VIOLENT, BITTER
AND VENGEFUL.

YOU
LOSE THE
SWORD.

HOARDING GOLD
--SIMPLY FOR THE
SAKE OF HOARDING
GOLD.

ELROD AND THE
ROACH BECOME
INESCAPABLE MANIFESTATIONS
OF YOUR INADEQUACIES
AND FAILED NATURE



THERE ARE AFTERSHOCKS
TO YOUR FRACTURED DESTINY--
THE SPIRIT OF NECROSS THE
MAD INHABITING THE GIANT
STONE THUNK MIRRORS
THE PROPHESED CONNECTION
BETWEEN YOURSELF AND
THE PISTISH IDOL...

WITH THE HELMET
AND THE SWORD
GONE, THE LAST RESIDUE
OF MAGIC IS FADING
FROM YOUR LIFE

YOU INFLUENCE PEOPLE
AND EVENTS, BUT IN A
CHAOTIC FASHION THAT IS
OUT OF YOUR CONTROL...

YOUR JOURNEY INTO
THE SEVENTH SPHERE
--AS A PAWN IN THE
LARGER GAME--

ELROD'S SPIRIT
POSSESSING THE HsIFAN
ASSASSIN... THE APOCALYPSE
BEASTS... PROFESSOR
CHARLES X. CLAREMONT

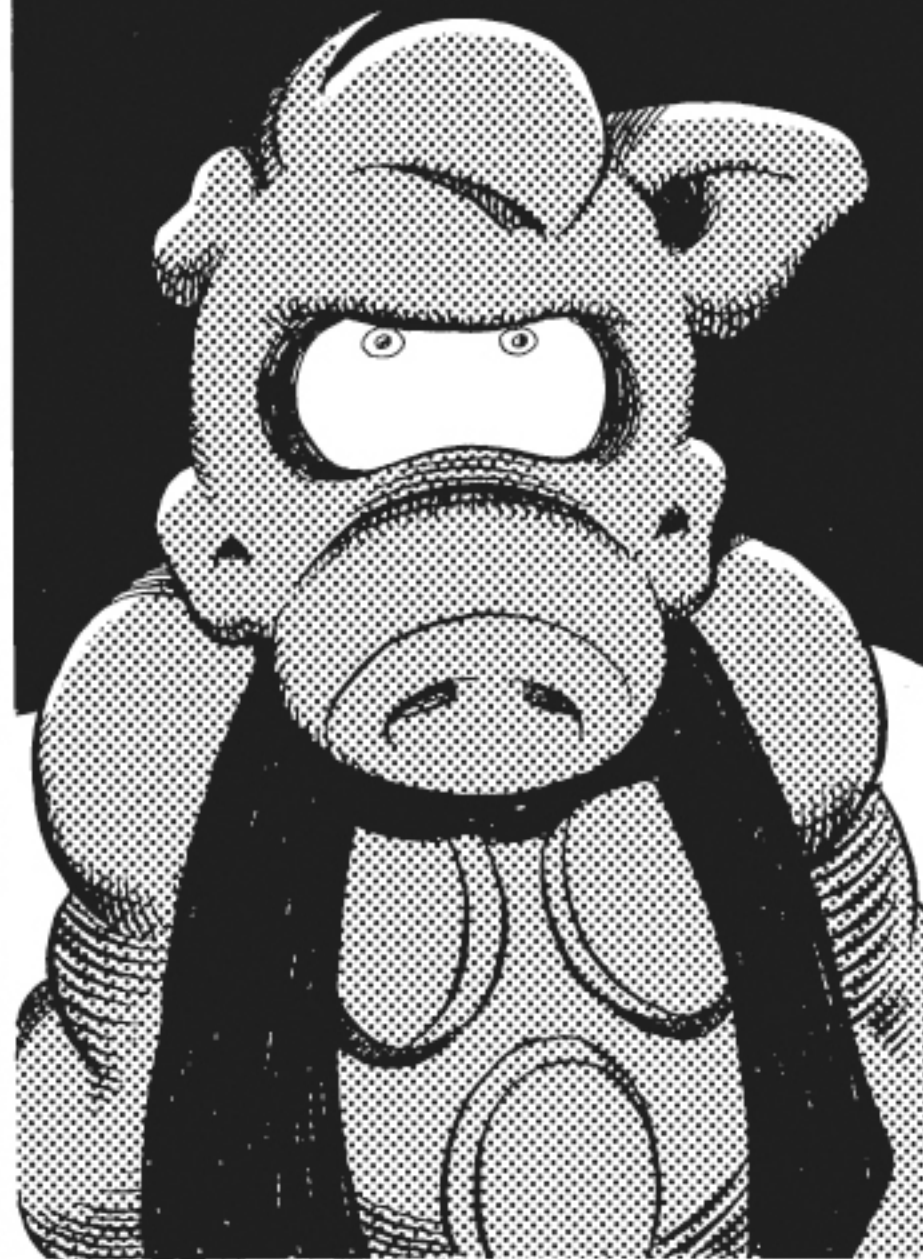
...THE REGENCY
ELF... GOING...
GOING

GOING

GONE.

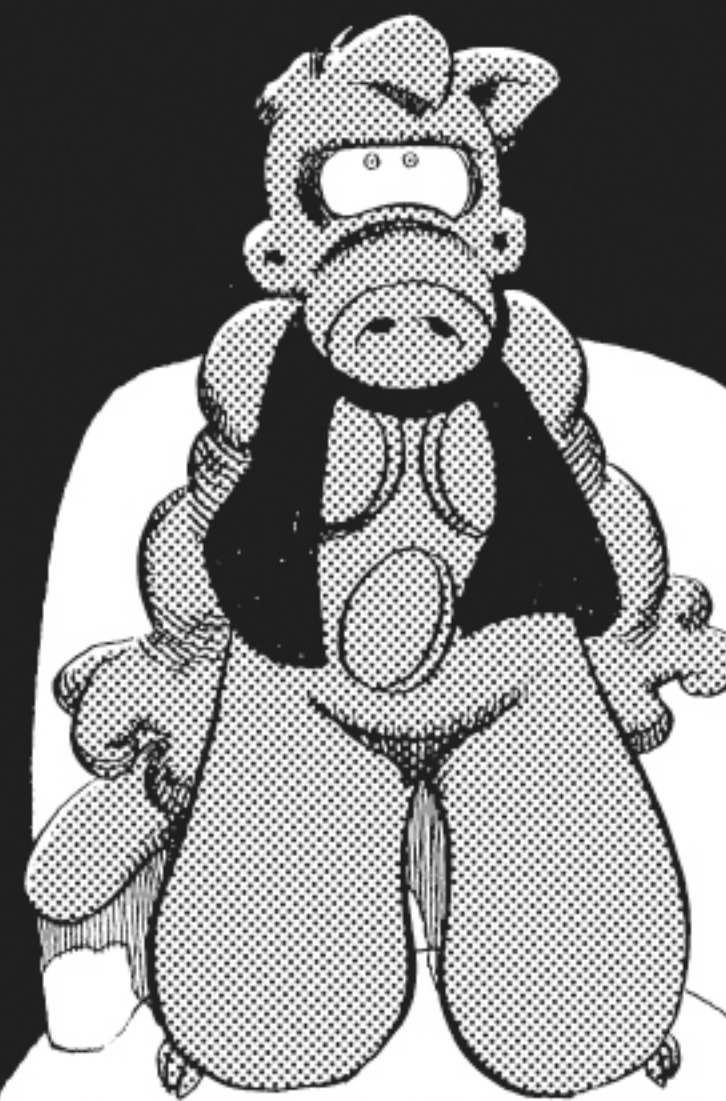


YOUR OBSESSIVE
INTEREST IN GOLD AND
THE CHAOTIC INFLUENCE
YOU HAVE ON PEOPLE
AND EVENTS SERVE
YOU IN GOOD STEAD
IN THE FIELD OF
POLITICS...



AND ARE EVEN BETTER-
SUITED TO THE CHURCH--
FOUNDED AS IT IS ON
PROPHECY AND MONEY

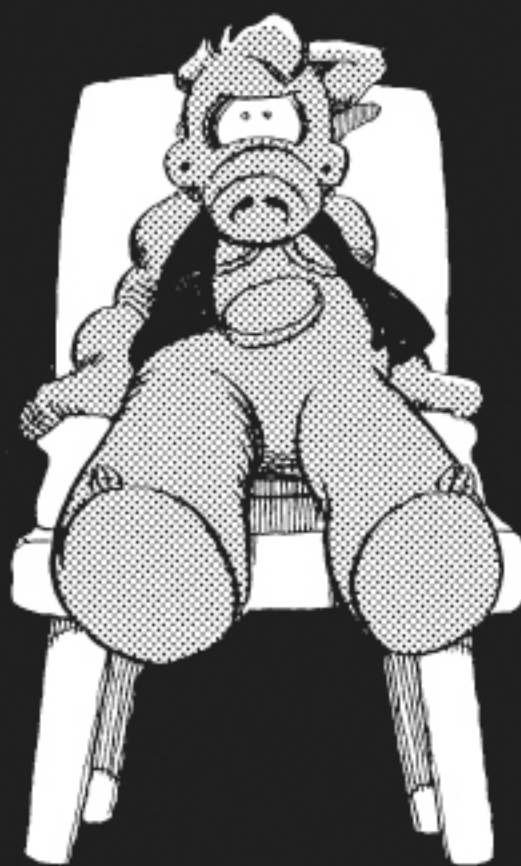
HAVING FRACTURED YOUR
PIGISH DESTINY, YOU
DRIFT INTO THE VORTEX
OF THE EASTERN CHURCH
-- AS HAD SO MANY OF
YOUR ANCESTORS
BEFORE YOU...



MAN VERSUS WOMAN,
RULER VERSUS REBEL,
RICH VERSUS POOR, CAP-
TOR VERSUS CAPTIVE,
AARDVARK VERSUS
HUMAN, ET CETERA

FIRST ONE AND
THEN THE
OTHER

TWO INCARNATIONS
LOCKED INTO AN
ENDLESS, POINTLESS
DUALITY



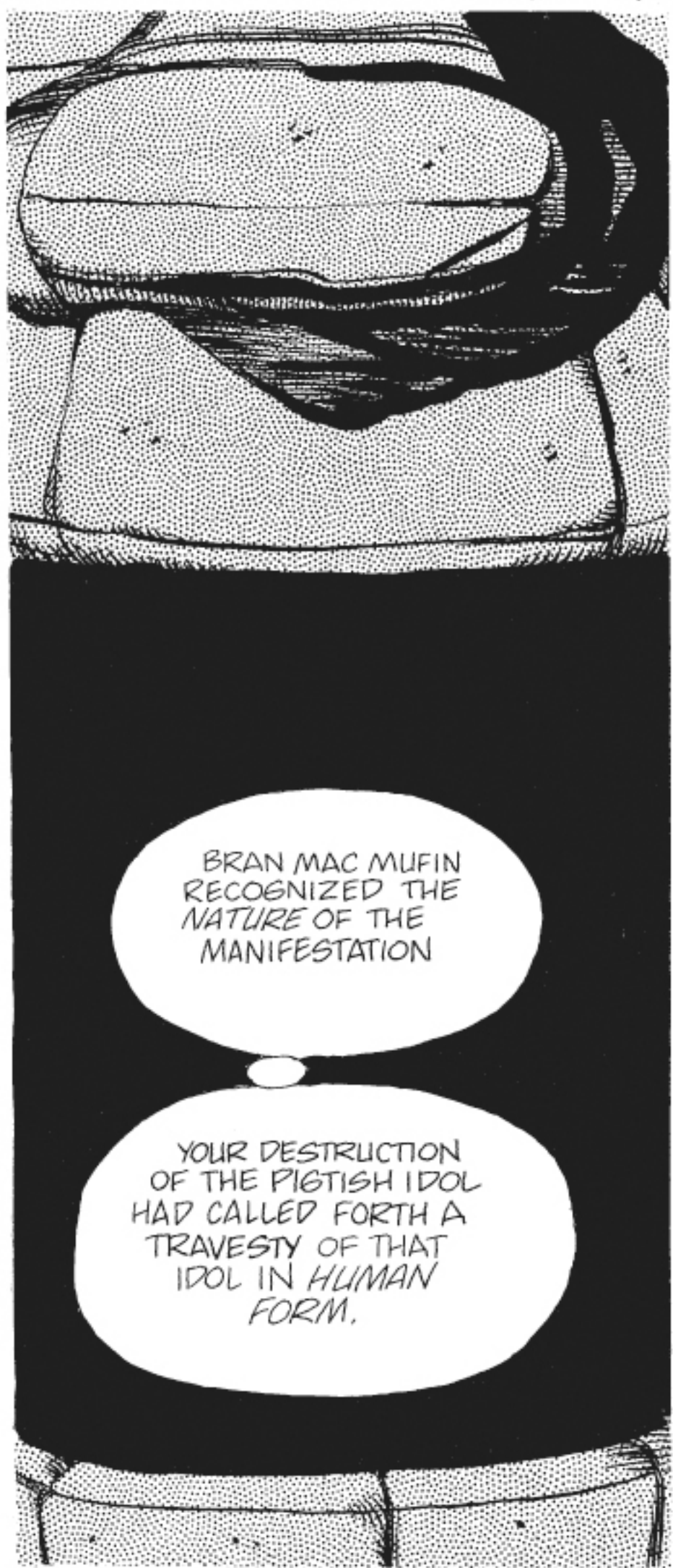
BUT, OF COURSE, THAT
WOULD COME LATER.
FIRST, YOUR SUCCESS
AS POPE (COUPLED
WITH THE NEAR-
CONSENSUS THAT
YOU REPRESENTED
THE IDEAL FORM
OF THE AARDVARK.)

CALLED FORTH
THE CLOSEST
MANIFESTATION
OF THE FULFILLED
PROPHECY.



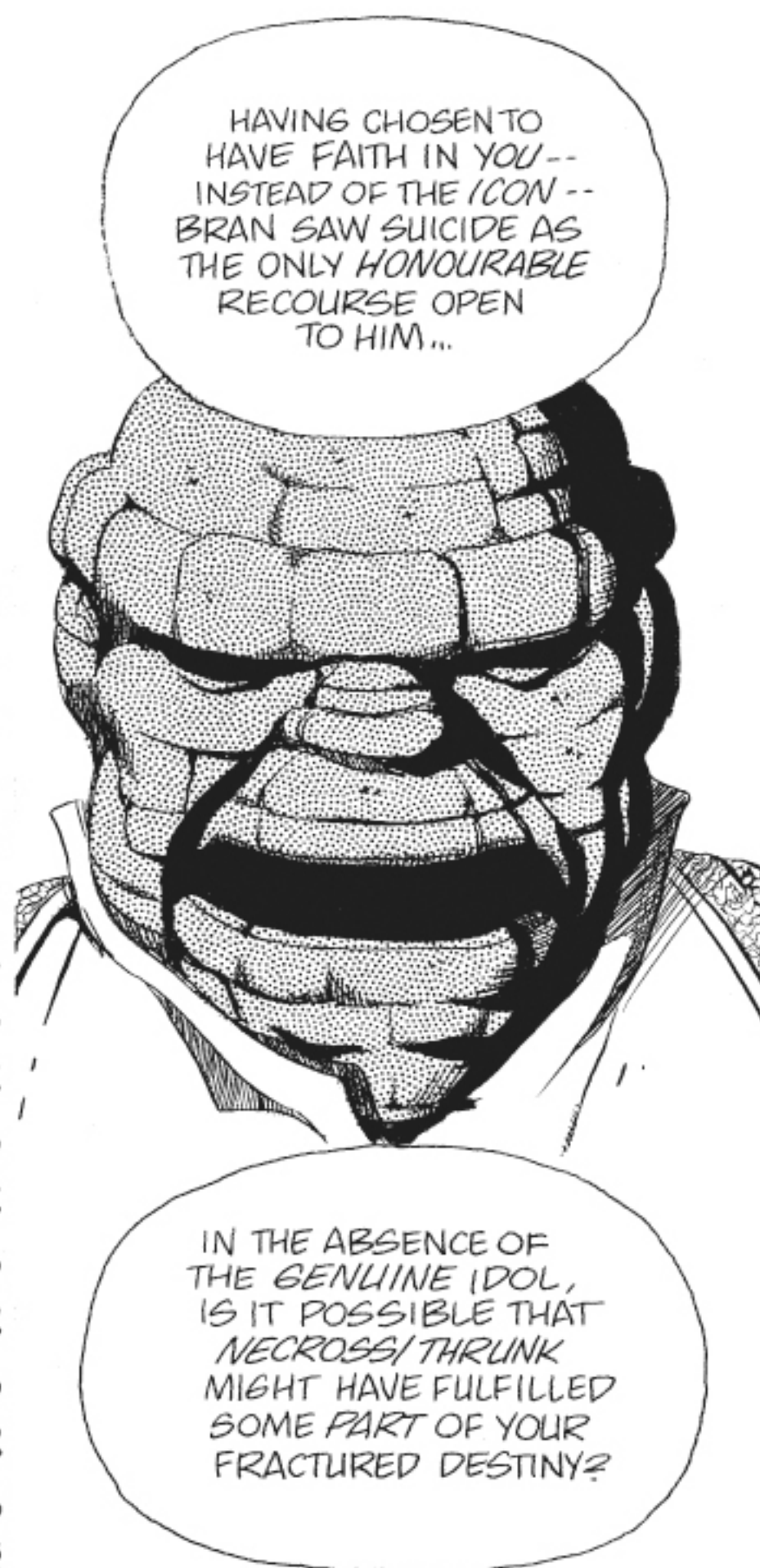
GUESS
WHO?





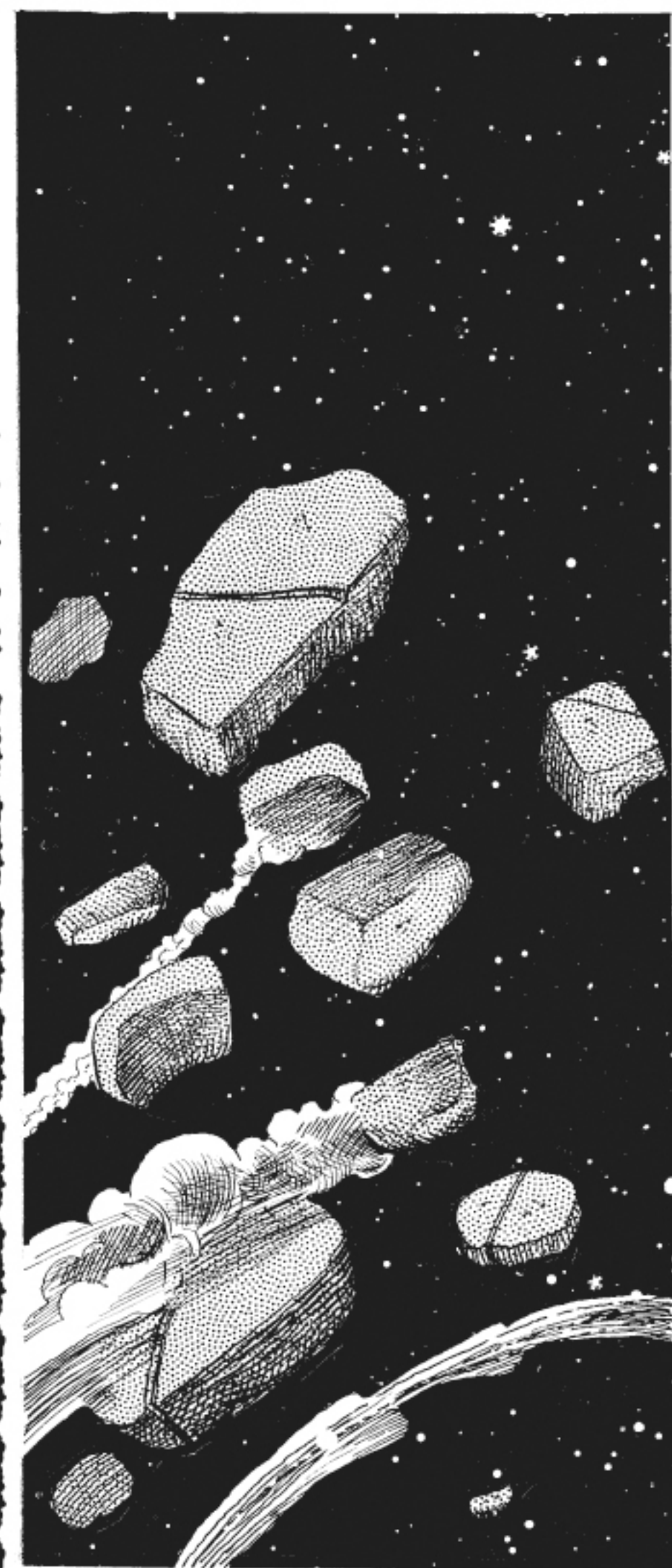
BRAN MAC MUFIN
RECOGNIZED THE
NATURE OF THE
MANIFESTATION

YOUR DESTRUCTION
OF THE PIGTISH IDOL
HAD CALLED FORTH A
TRAVESTY OF THAT
IDOL IN HUMAN
FORM.



HAVING CHOSEN TO
HAVE FAITH IN YOU--
INSTEAD OF THE /CON--
BRAN SAW SUICIDE AS
THE ONLY HONOURABLE
RECOURSE OPEN
TO HIM...

IN THE ABSENCE OF
THE GENUINE IDOL,
IS IT POSSIBLE THAT
NECROSS/THUNK
MIGHT HAVE FULFILLED
SOME PART OF YOUR
FRACTURED DESTINY?



THERE'S
NO WAY OF
KNOWING,
REALLY...

IS
THERE?

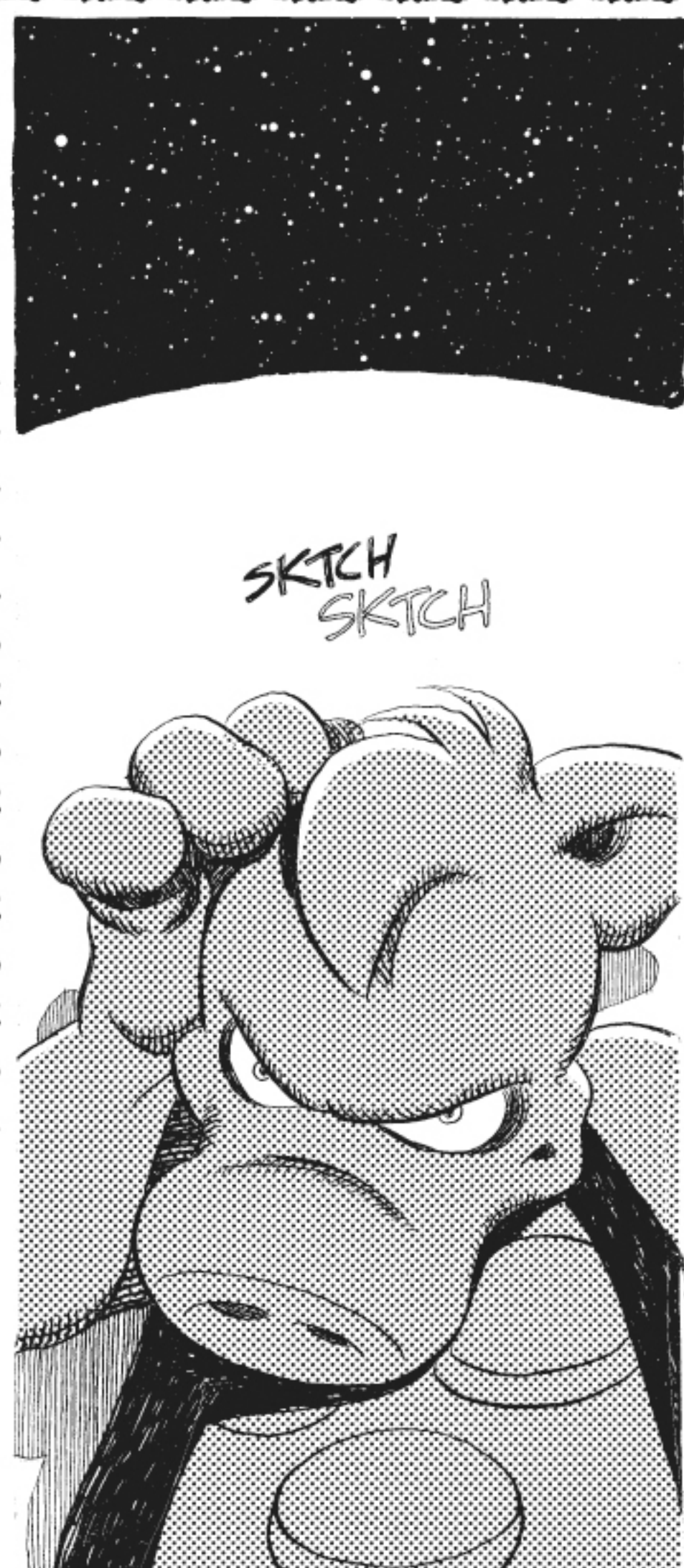


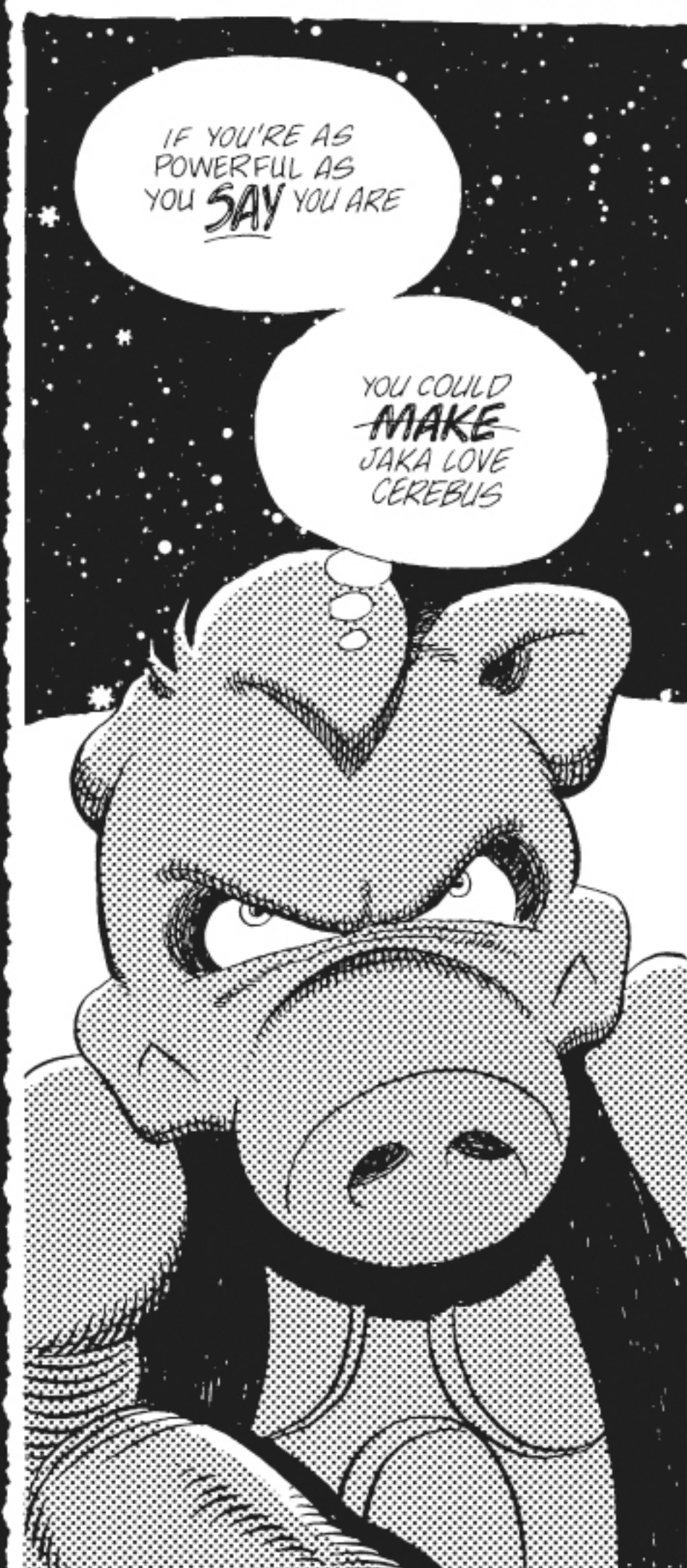
A BIT LONG-
WINDED AS ANSWERS
GO, BUT THERE
YOU HAVE IT...

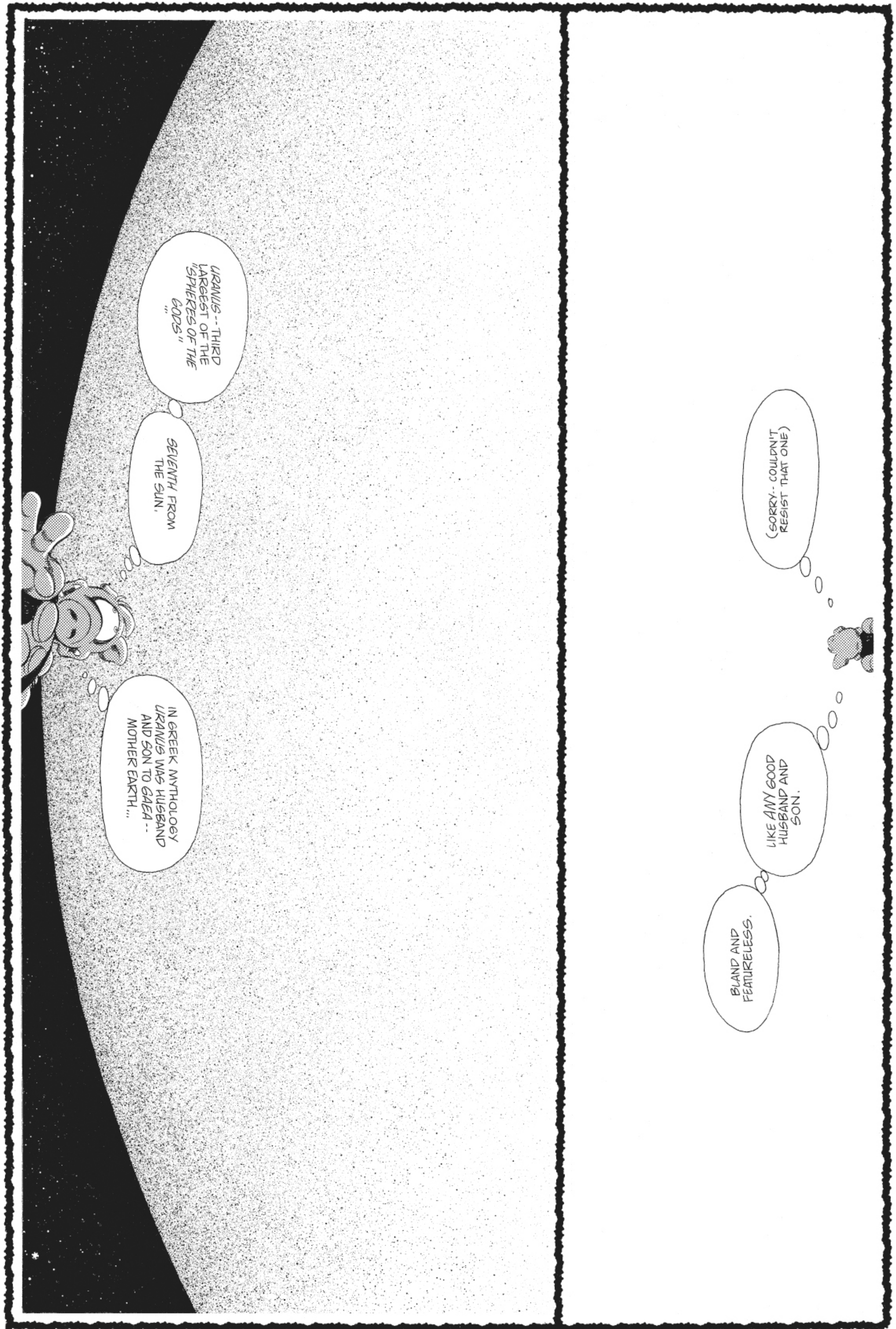
THAT'S

"EXACTLY"

WHAT THOSE
"DAMNED THINGS"
ARE,







URANUS--THIRD
LARGEST OF THE
"SPHERES OF THE
GODS"

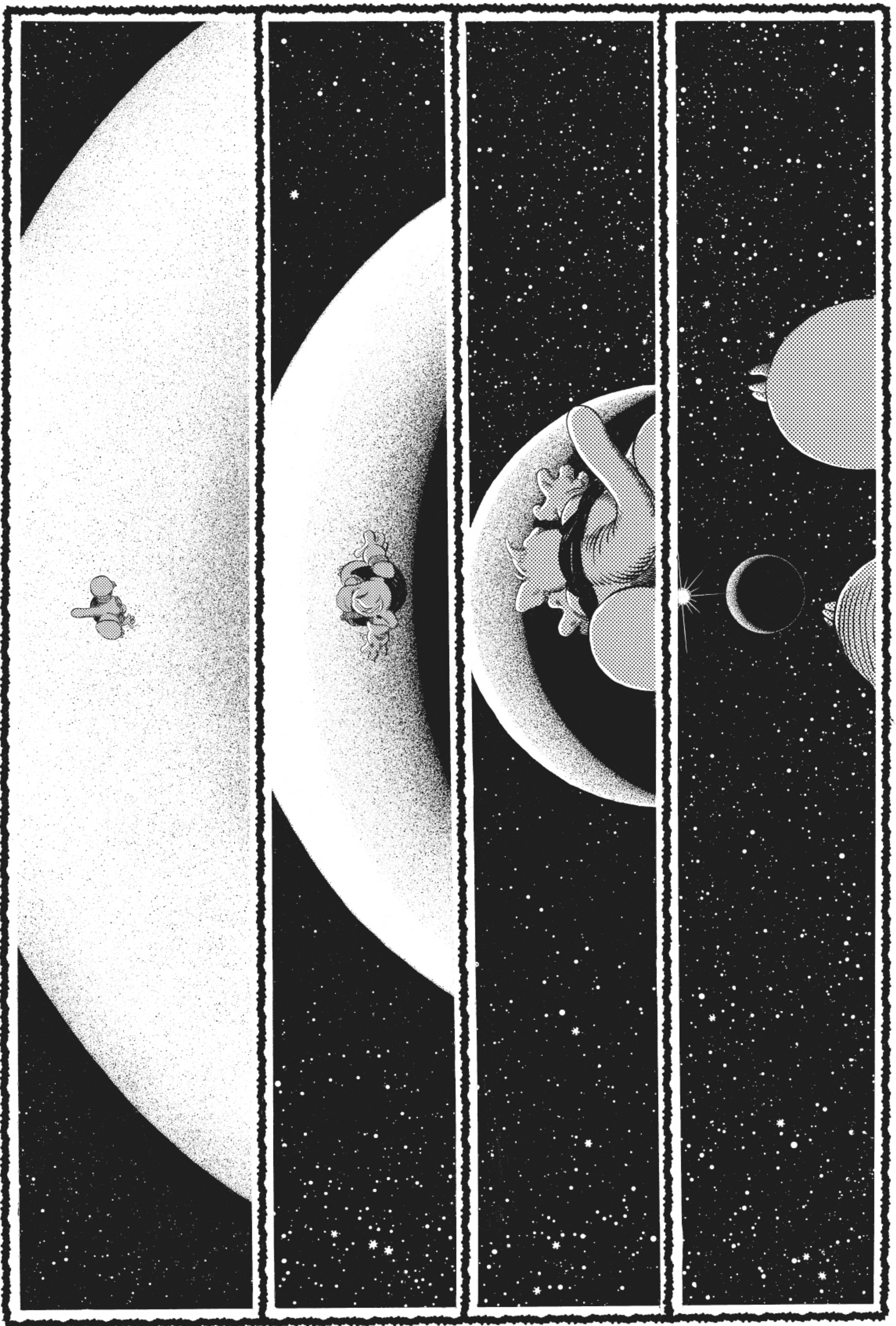
SEVENTH FROM
THE SUN.

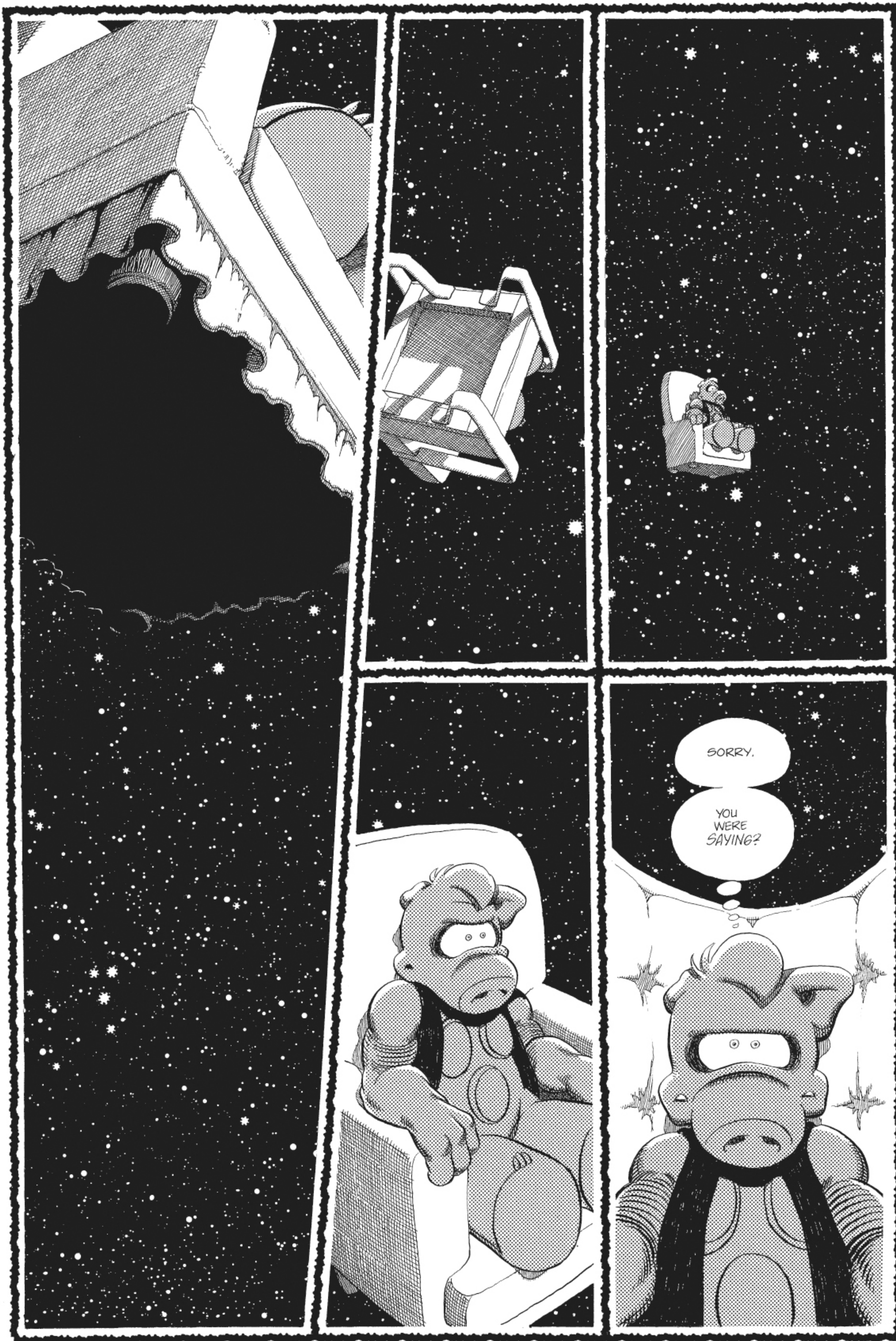
IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY
URANUS WAS HUSBAND
AND SON TO GAIA--
MOTHER EARTH...

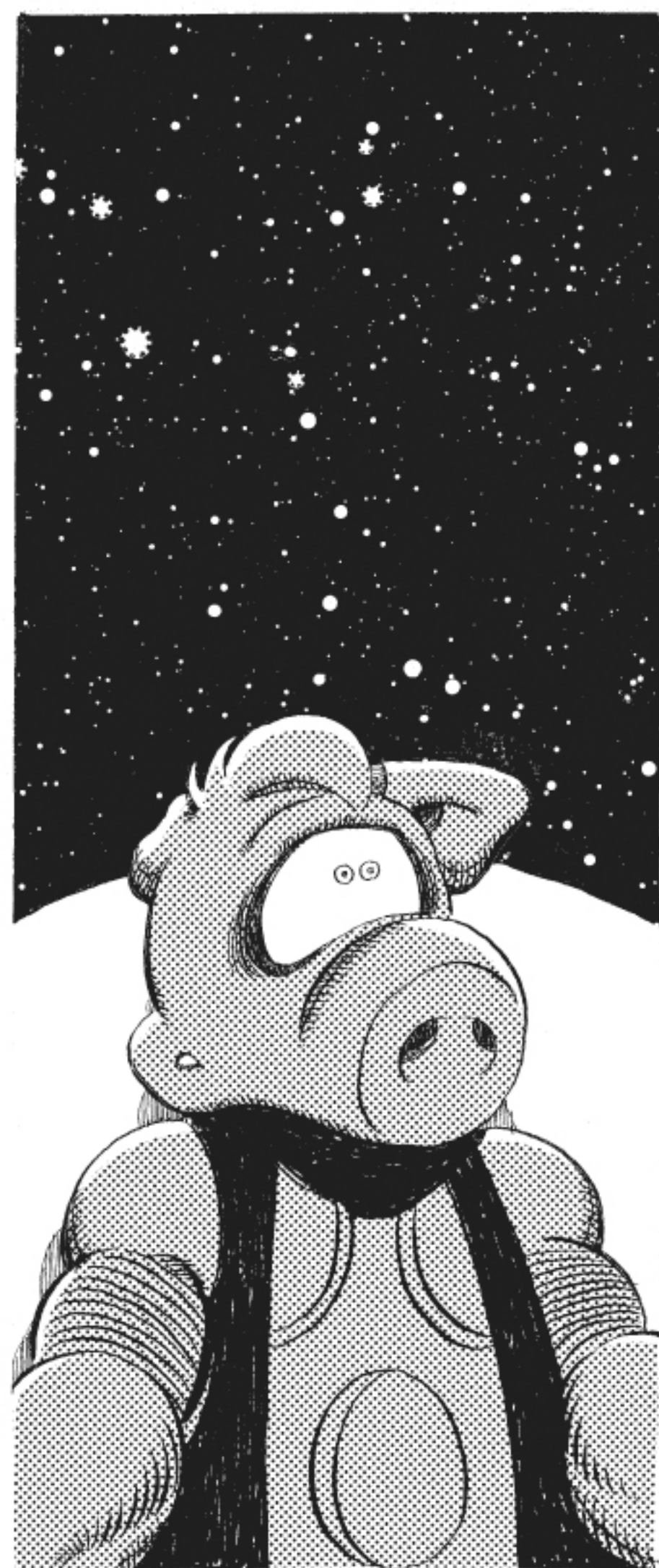
(SORRY-- COULDN'T
RESIST THAT ONE)

LIKE ANY GOOD
HUSBAND AND
SON.

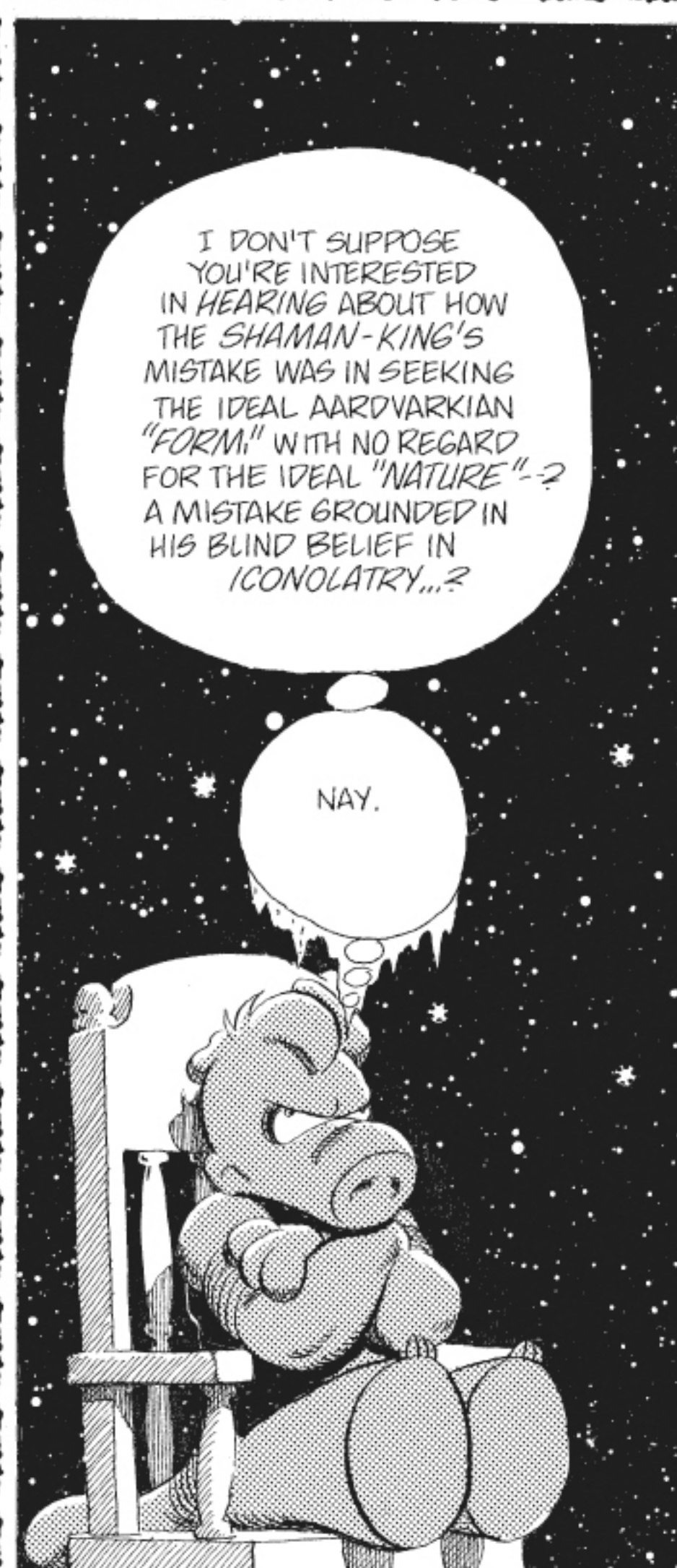
BLAND AND
FEATURELESS.





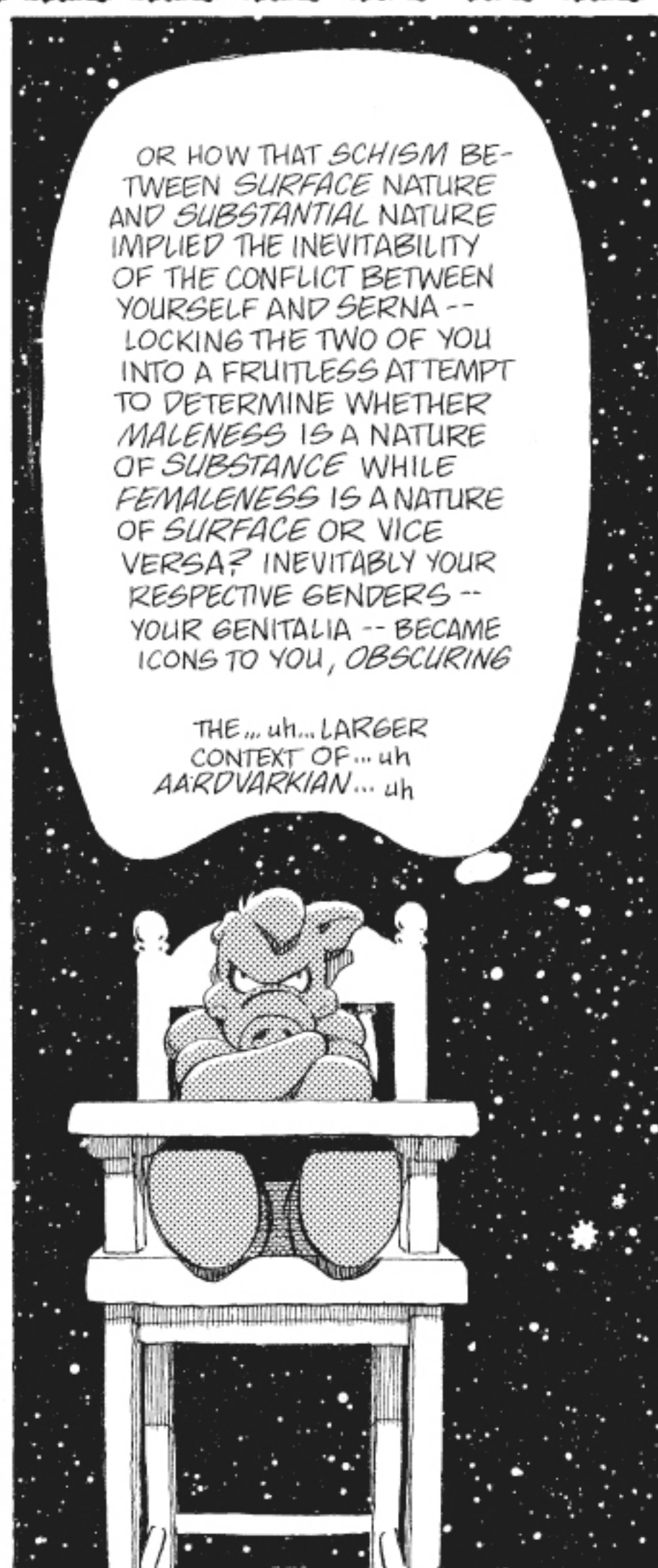


YOU COULD
MAKE
JAKA LOVE
CEREBUS
"THAT
WAY"



I DON'T SUPPOSE
YOU'RE INTERESTED
IN HEARING ABOUT HOW
THE SHAMAN-KING'S
MISTAKE WAS IN SEEKING
THE IDEAL AARDVARKIAN
"FORM," WITH NO REGARD
FOR THE IDEAL "NATURE" --?
A MISTAKE GROUNDED IN
HIS BLIND BELIEF IN
ICONOLATRY...?

NAY.



OR HOW THAT SCHISM BE-
TWEEN SURFACE NATURE
AND SUBSTANTIAL NATURE
IMPLIED THE INEVITABILITY
OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN
YOURSELF AND SERNA --
LOCKING THE TWO OF YOU
INTO A FRUITLESS ATTEMPT
TO DETERMINE WHETHER
MALENESS IS A NATURE
OF SUBSTANCE WHILE
FEMALENESS IS A NATURE
OF SURFACE OR VICE
VERSA? INEVITABLY YOUR
RESPECTIVE GENDERS --
YOUR GENITALIA -- BECAME
ICONS TO YOU, OBSCURING

THE ... uh ... LARGER
CONTEXT OF ... uh
AARDVARKIAN ... uh



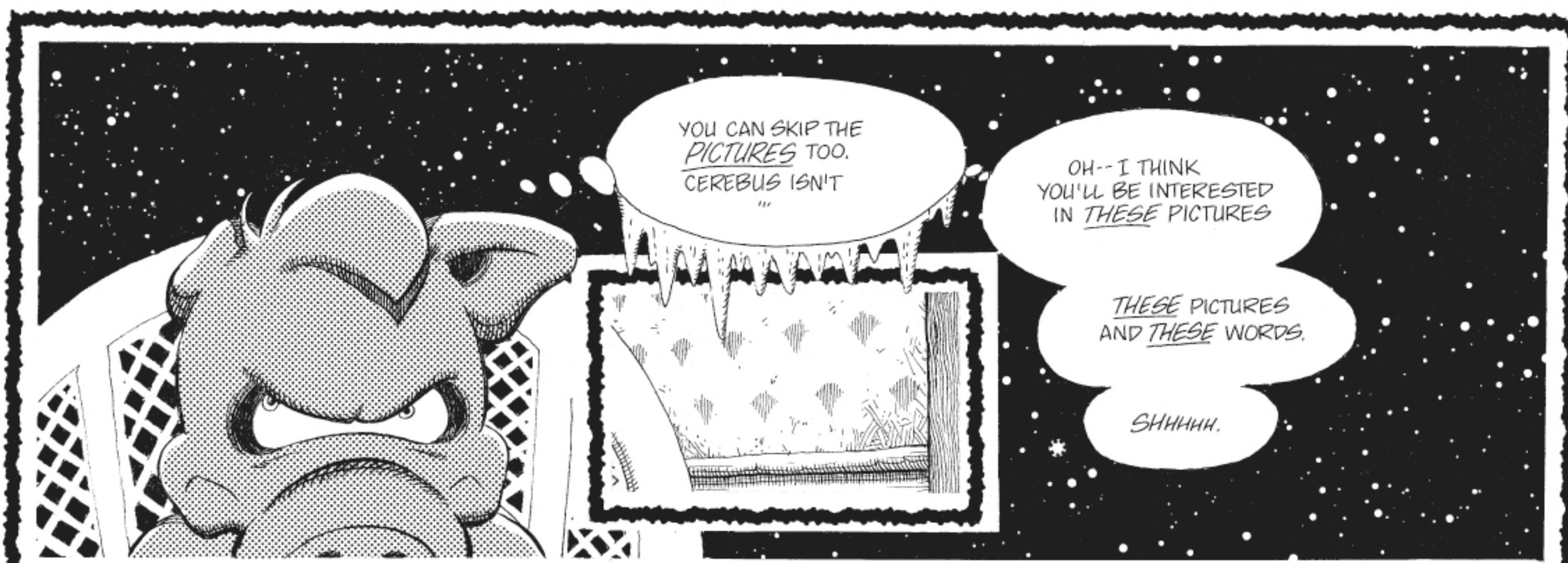
AARDVARKIAN NATURE --
INCLUDING THE ... LARGEST ...
UNRESOLVED QUESTION OF
WHETHER TWO AARDVARKS
CAN PRODUCE AARDVARK
OFFSPRING. ARE ... uh ...
ARE AARDVARKS POTENTIAL
MUTATIONS? OR

IS THE HISTORICAL
PERCEPTION OF
THEMSELVES AS ... uh
SPONTANEOUSLY

GENERATED

ABBERATIONS
... uh ...



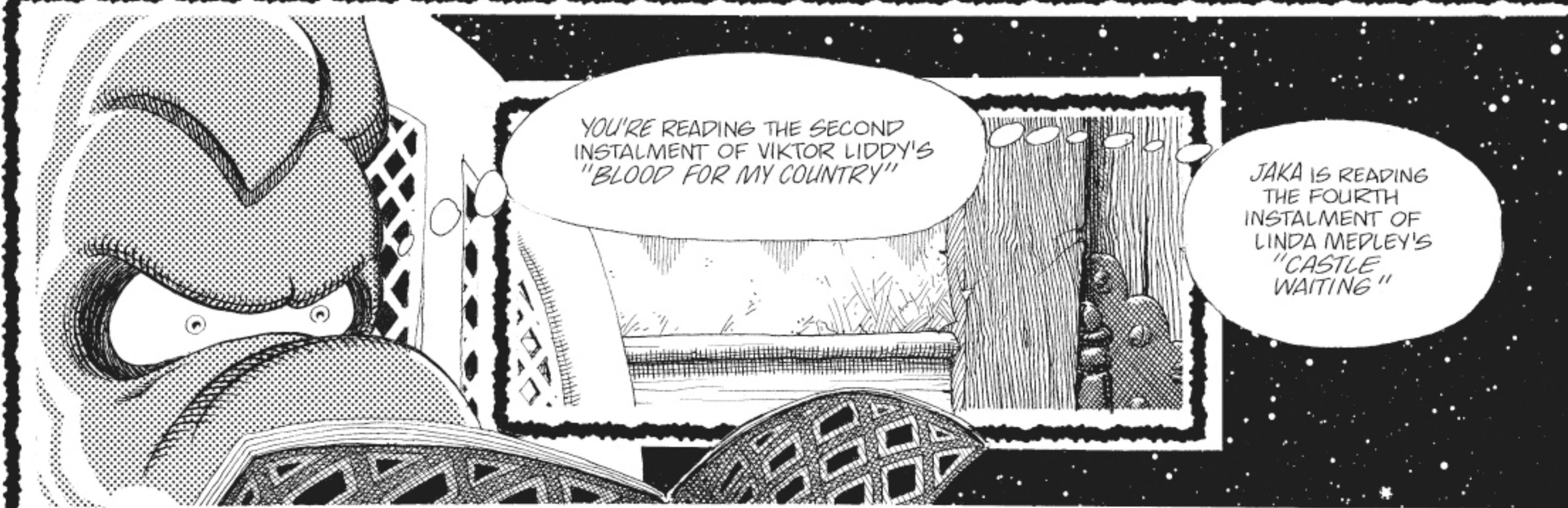


YOU CAN SKIP THE
PICTURES TOO.
CEREBUS ISN'T

OH-- I THINK
YOU'LL BE INTERESTED
IN THESE PICTURES

THESE PICTURES
AND THESE WORDS.

SHHHHH.



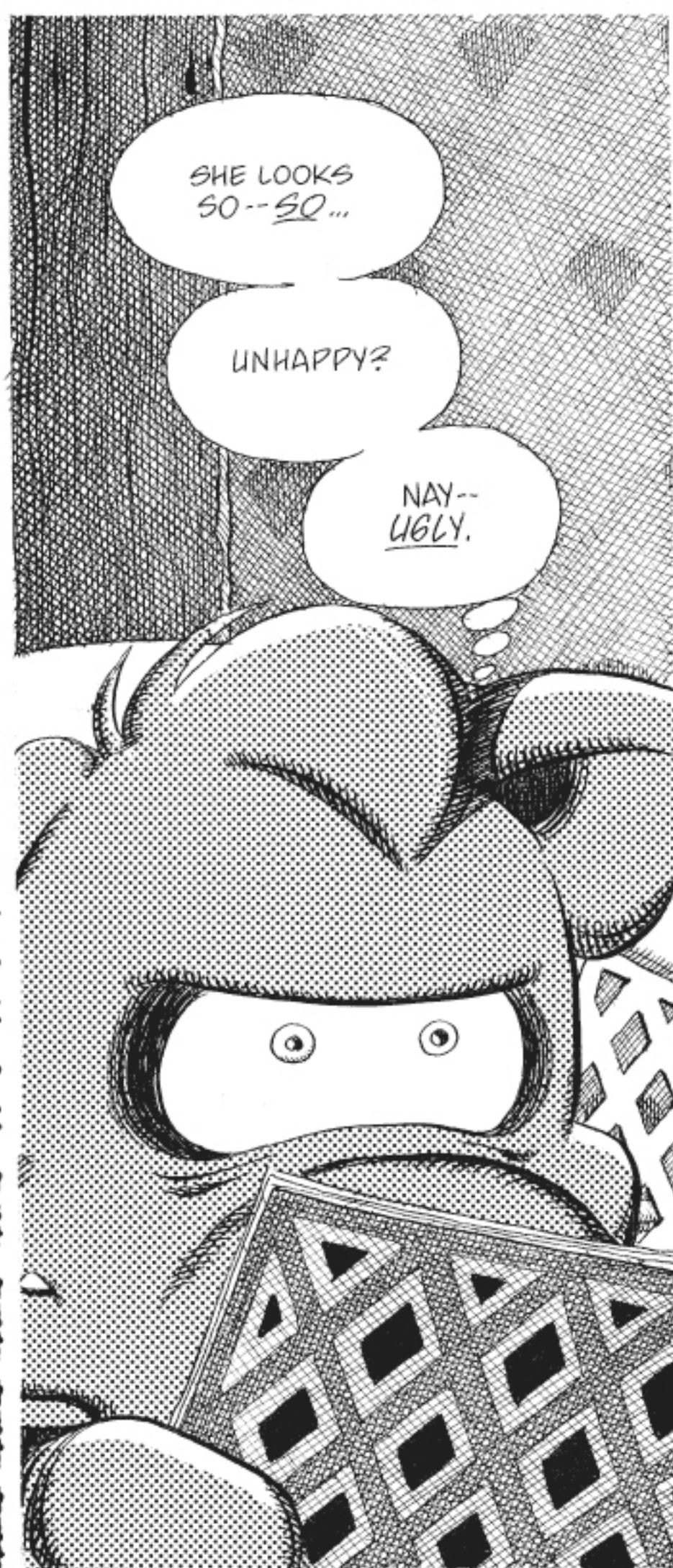
YOU'RE READING THE SECOND
INSTALMENT OF VIKTOR LIDDY'S
"BLOOD FOR MY COUNTRY"

JAKA IS READING
THE FOURTH
INSTALMENT OF
LINDA MERLEY'S
"CASTLE
WAITING"



YOU'VE BEEN
MARRIED FOR
A YEAR AND FIVE
MONTHS.

WONDER
IF
THE
WORLD
OF
THE
FUTURE
IS
THE
SAME
AS
THE
PAST



SHE LOOKS
SO--SO...

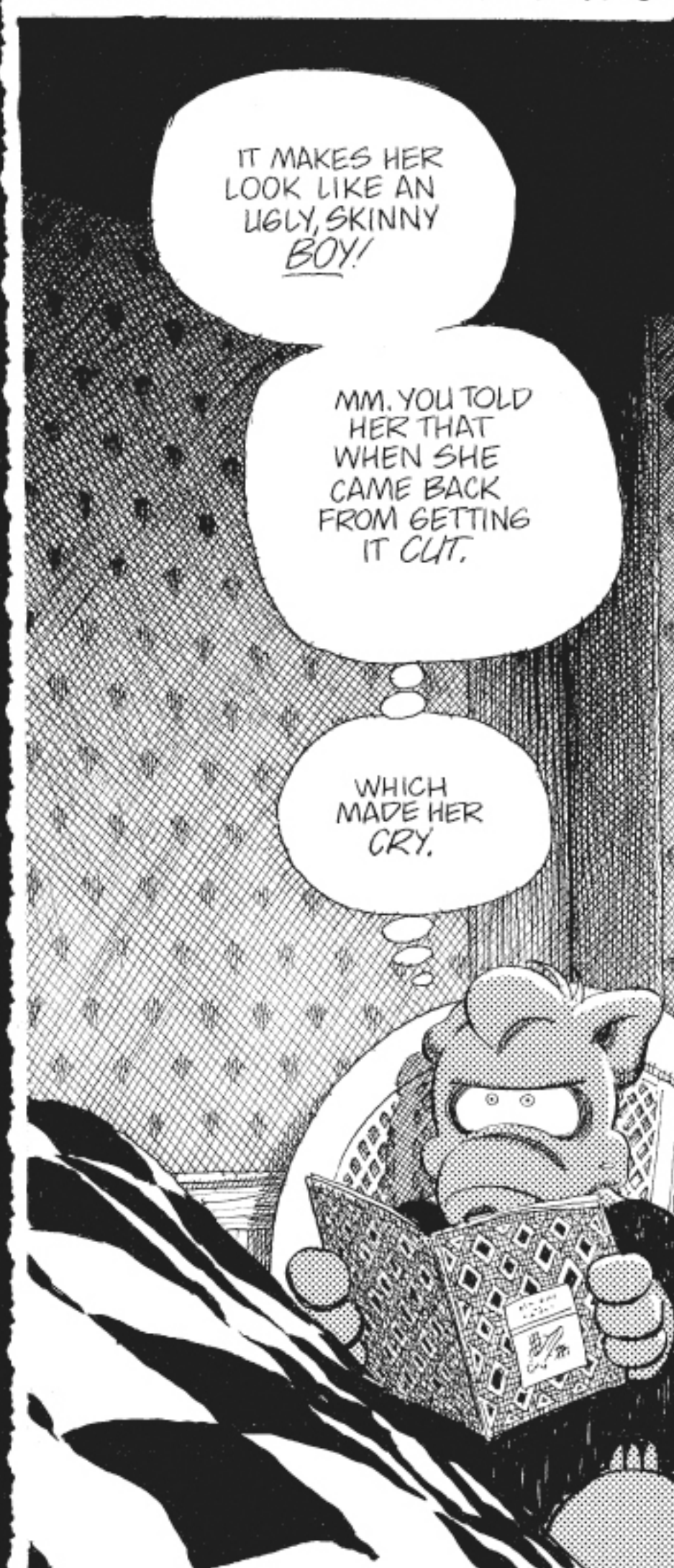
UNHAPPY?

NAY--
UGLY.



SHE CUT OFF
HER HAIR--
WHY DID SHE
CUT OFF HER
HAIR?

YOU TOLD HER TO.
YOU TOLD HER ONLY
SLUTS AND HARLOTS
HAVE LONG HAIR



IT MAKES HER
LOOK LIKE AN
UGLY, SKINNY
BOY!

MM, YOU TOLD
HER THAT
WHEN SHE
CAME BACK
FROM GETTING
IT CUT,

WHICH
MADE HER
CRY.



NOT RIGHT THEN, OF
COURSE. IF SHE CRIES
WHEN YOU'RE AROUND
YOU YELL AT HER AND
THREATEN TO HIT HER...
BUT WHEN YOU'RE NOT
AROUND SHE CRIES
QUITE A BIT...

THAT'S WHERE
SHE GOT THE POUCHES
UNDER HER EYES

FROM
CRYING AND NOT
GETTING ENOUGH
SLEEP.

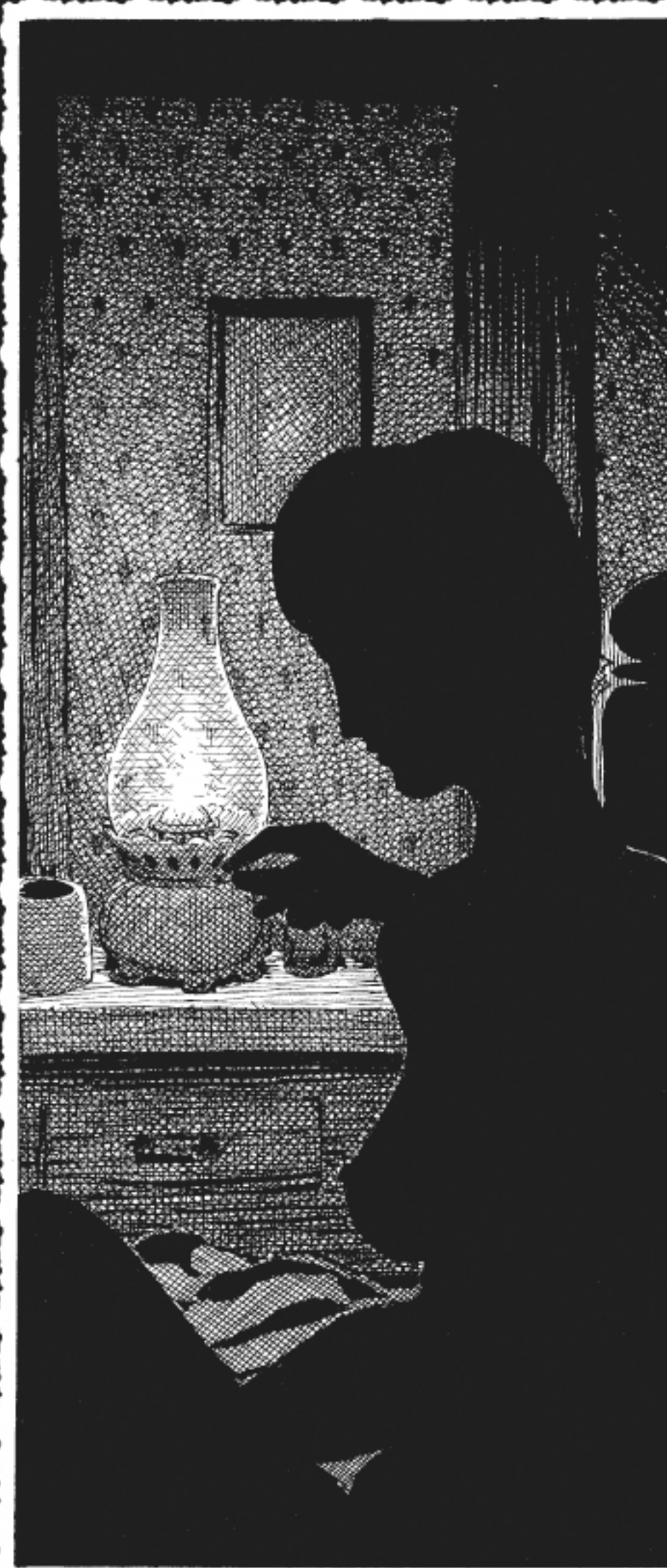
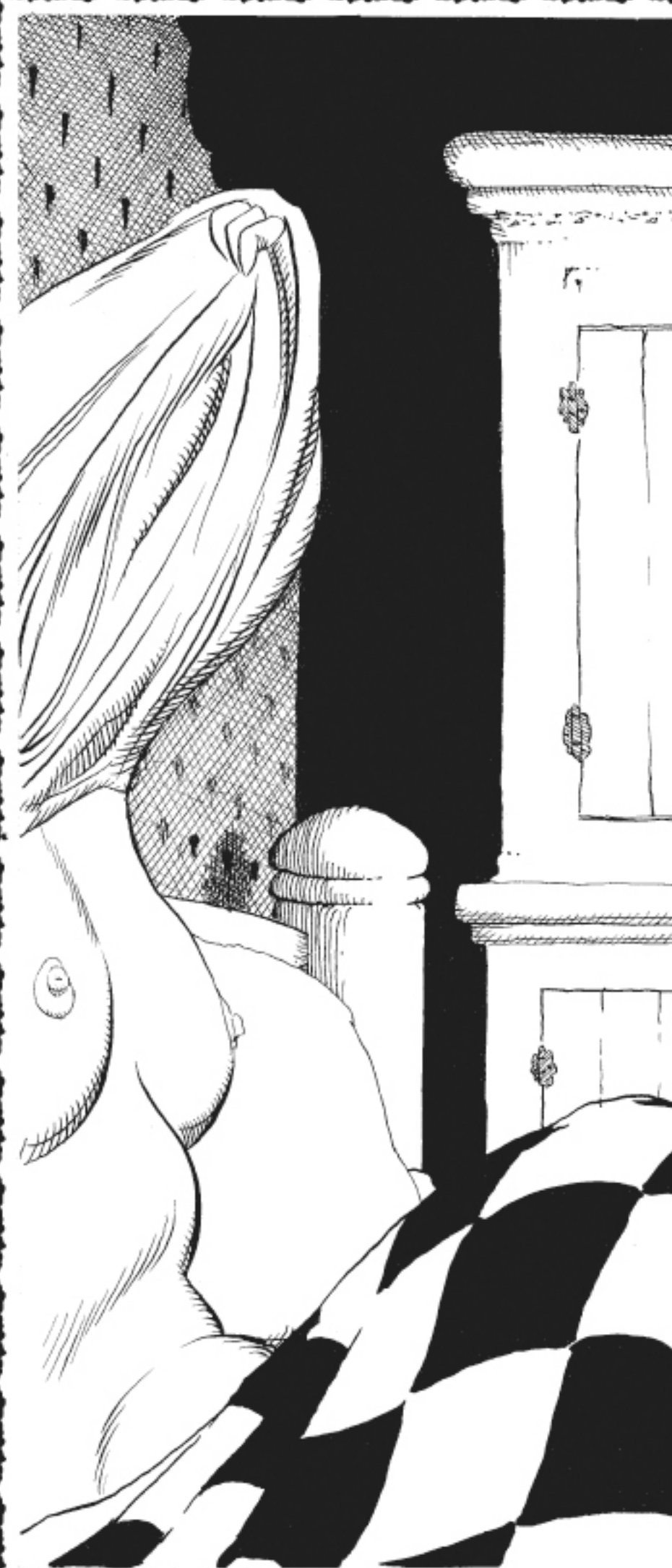
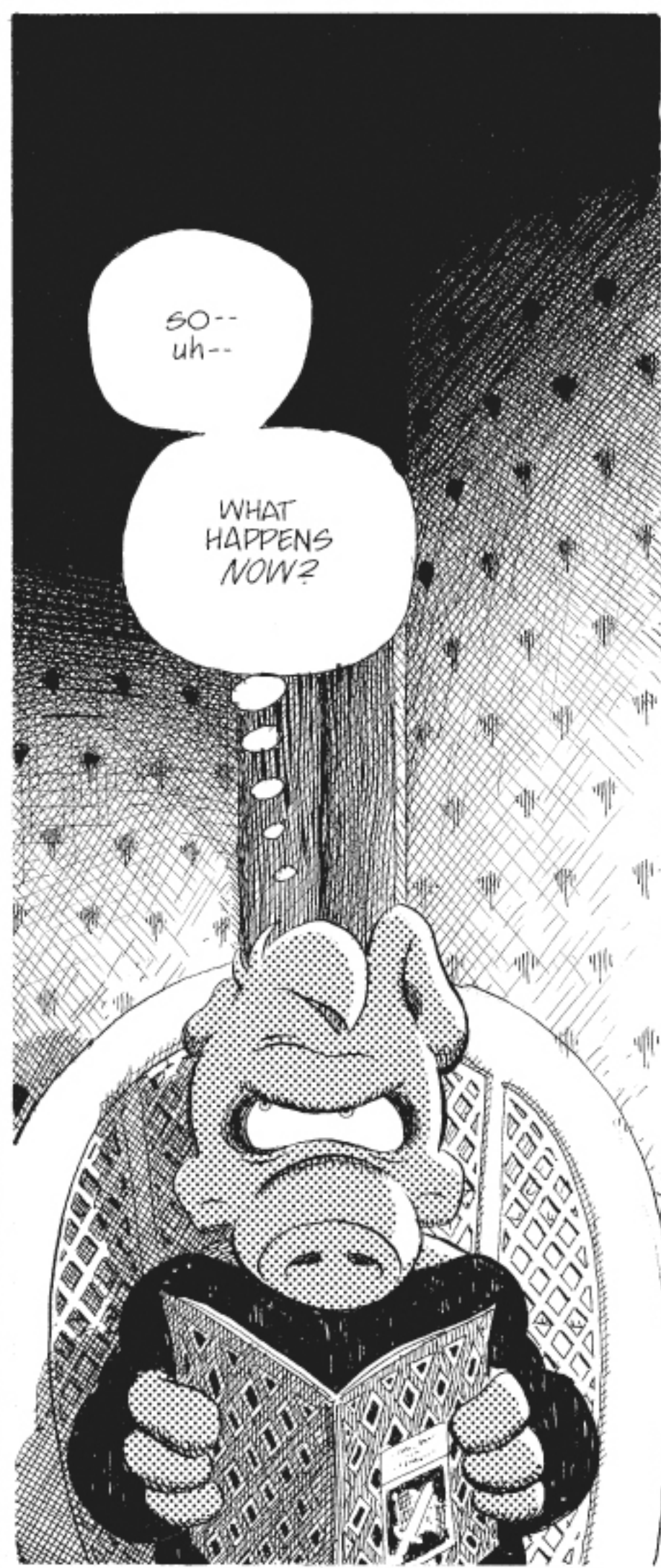


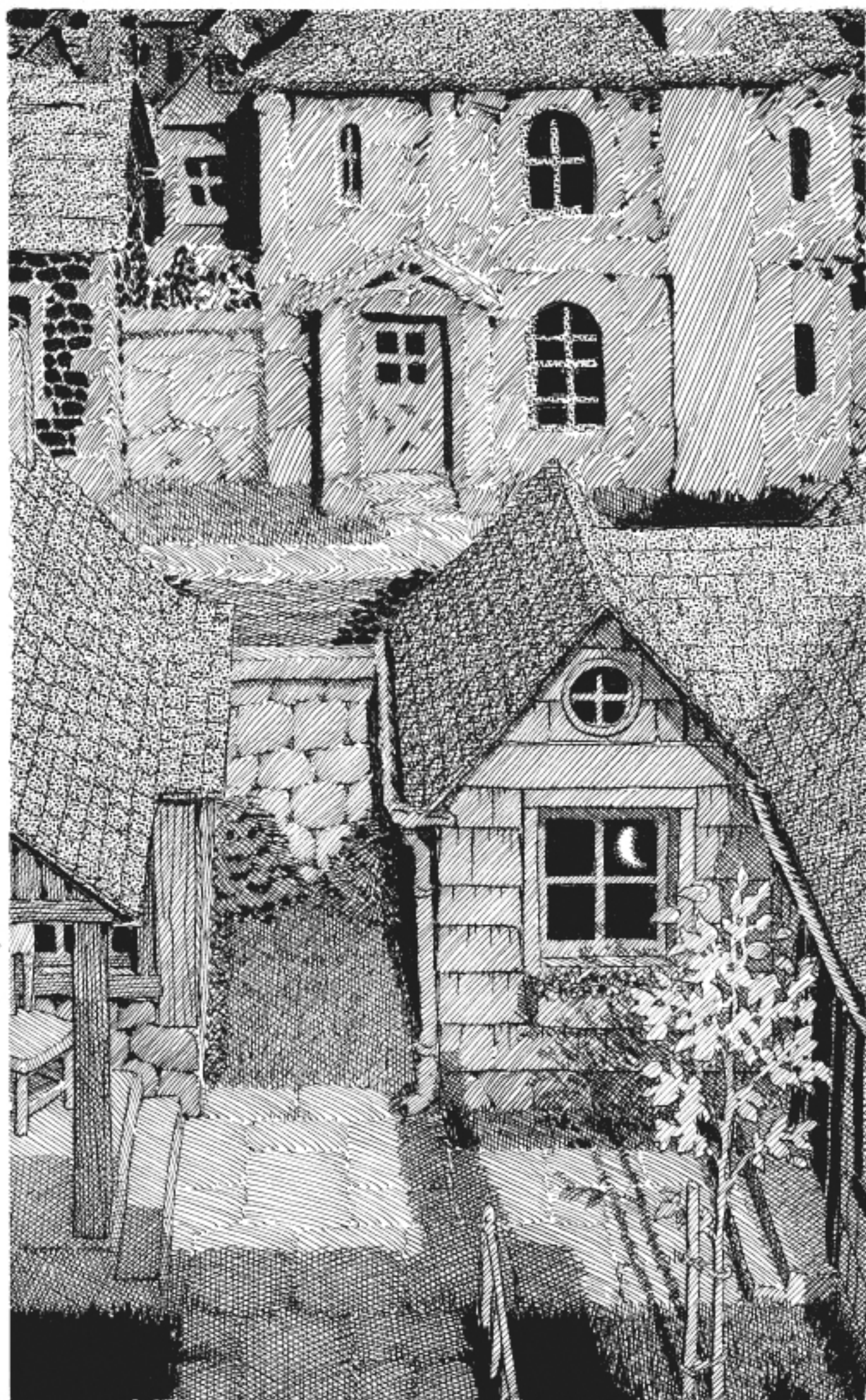
YOU TOLD HER IT'S HER
"DUTY" TO KEEP YOU COMPANY
AT NIGHT-- SHE ISN'T
ALLOWED TO SLEEP
UNTIL YOU'RE FINISHED
READING, EVEN THOUGH
SHE HAS TO WORK
IN THE MORNING
AND YOU DON'T...

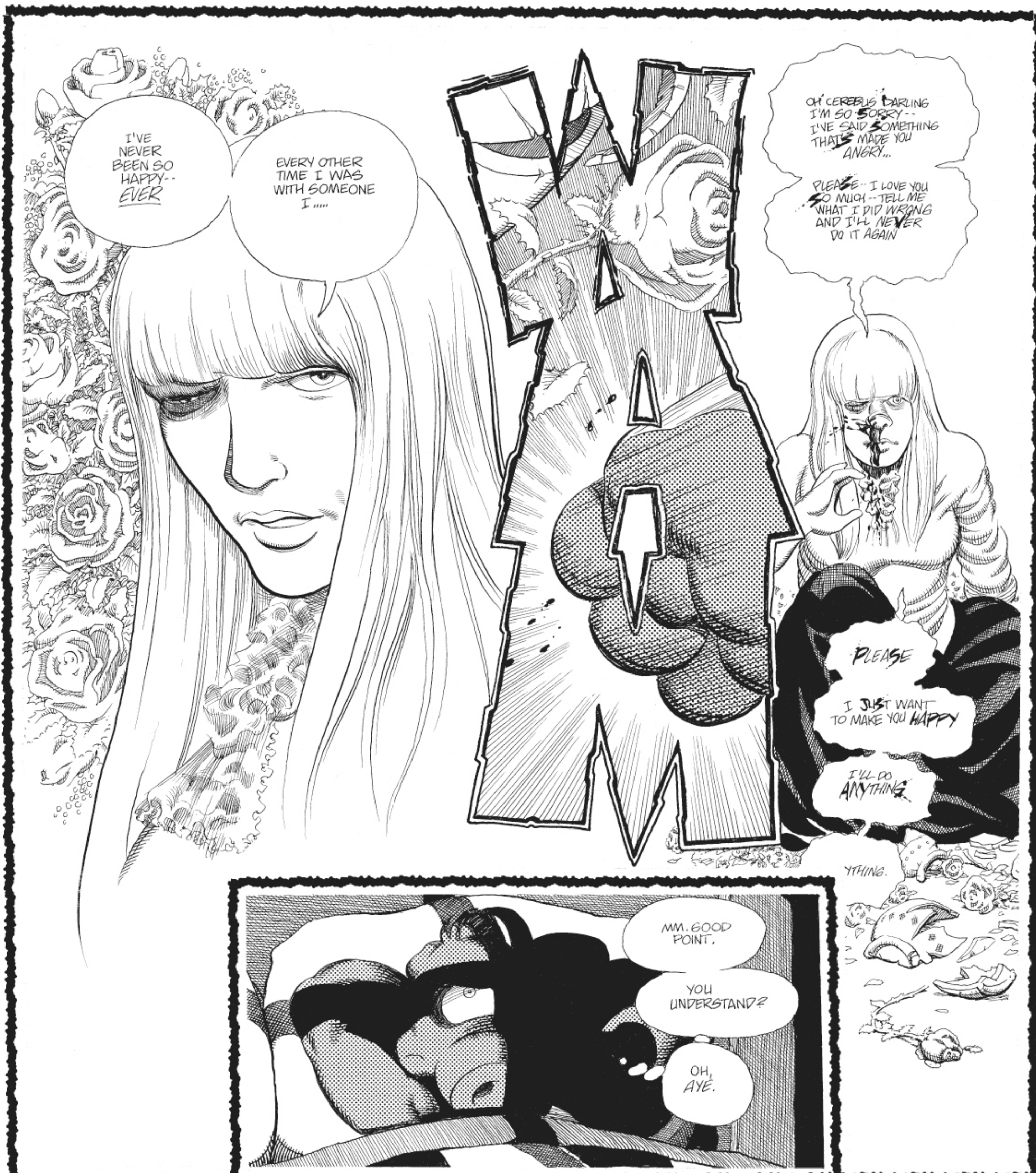
JUST ONE OF
YOUR MANY
RULES

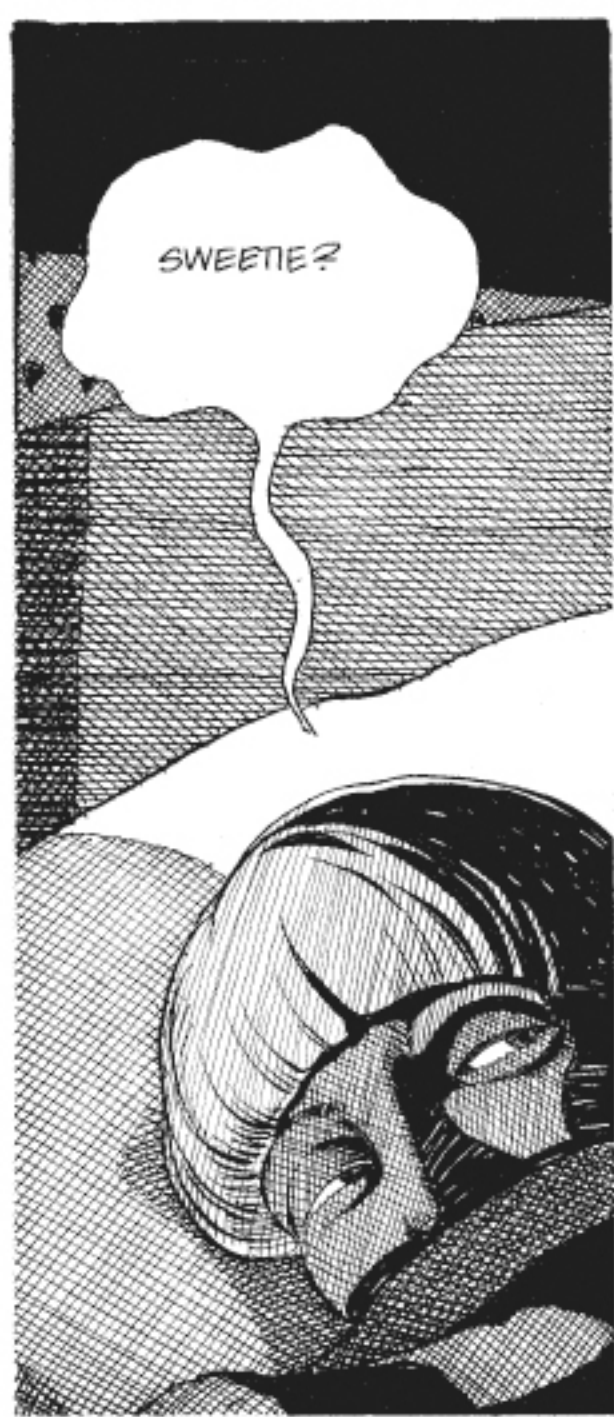
LIKE "NO TALKING
AFTER DINNER"
(TALKING AFTER
DINNER GIVES
YOU INDIGESTION)











SWEETIE?



IT'S OKAY, JAKA.

CEREBUS IS RIGHT HERE

GO BACK TO SLEEP



MMMMMM



OKAY!-- YOU MAKE HER HAPPY TO STAY WITH CEREBUS NO MATTER WHAT

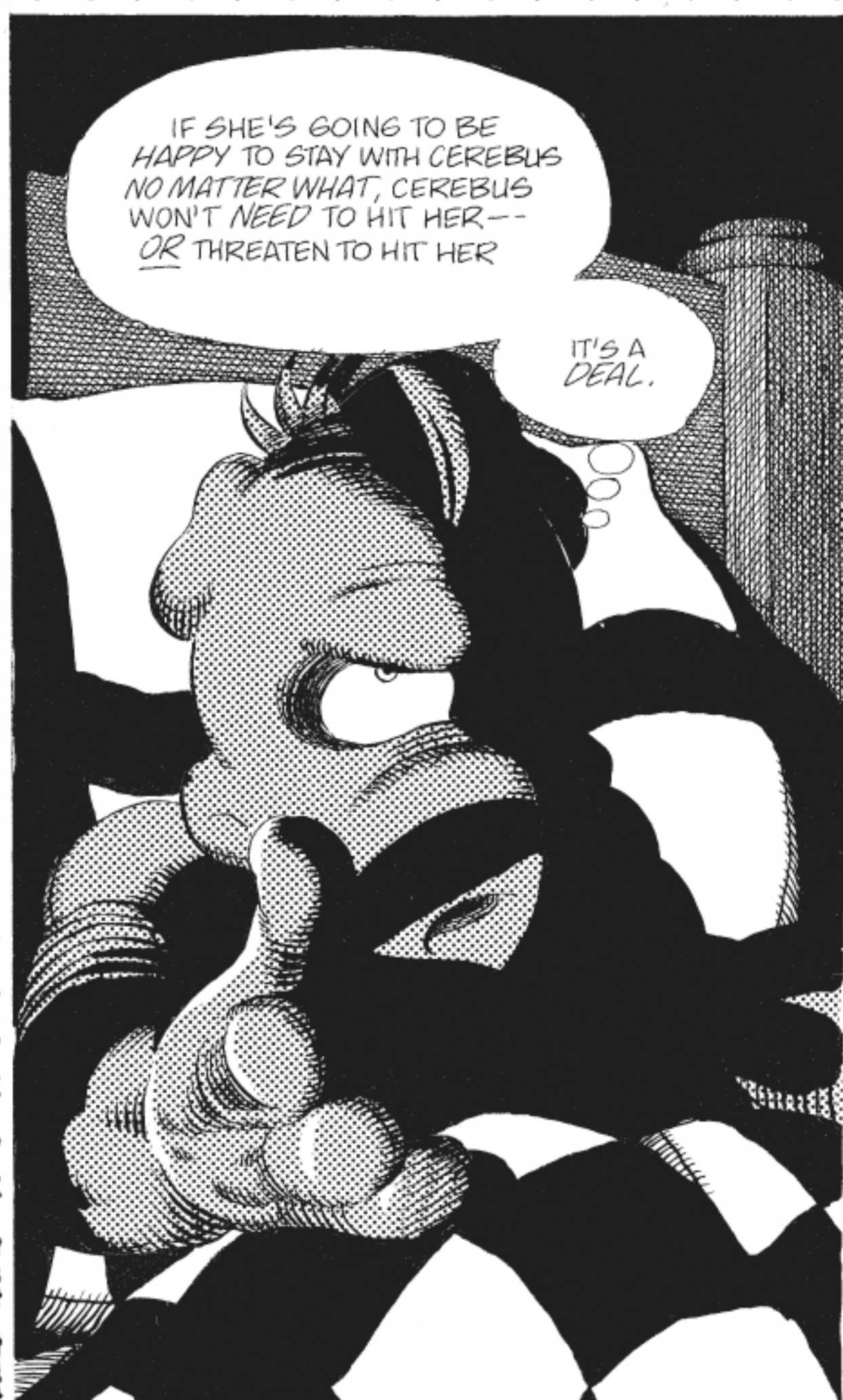
AND YOU MAKE IT SO CEREBUS NEVER HITS HER AGAIN-- EVER

OR THREATENS TO HIT HER?



AYE.

AYE, THAT'S A GOOD ONE.



IF SHE'S GOING TO BE HAPPY TO STAY WITH CEREBUS NO MATTER WHAT, CEREBUS WON'T NEED TO HIT HER-- OR THREATEN TO HIT HER

IT'S A DEAL.

YOU AND JAKA HAVE BEEN MARRIED FOR TWO YEARS. THINGS ARE GOING VERY WELL FOR BOTH OF YOU.

YOU SPEND YOUR DAYS READING BLOODTHIRSTY TALES OF MILITARY MAYHEM ANTICIPATING JAKA'S RETURN FROM HER JOB.

YOU HAVE LITTLE ON YOUR MIND BESIDES YOUR EVENING MEAL-- JAKA HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF A GOURMET COOK.

THAT CHANGES THIS PARTICULAR DAY, FOR THIS IS THE DAY YOU SEE YOUR NEW NEIGHBOUR FOR THE FIRST TIME.

THE HOT SUMMER SUDDENLY SEEMS A LOT HOTTER.

A LOT HOTTER.

SHE FINISHES HANGING OUT HER WASH.

AND GOES BACK INSIDE HER HOUSE

YOU DON YOUR HEAVY BLUE SWEATER (THE ONE JAKA HAS SAID MAKES YOU LOOK THINNER) AND STROLL OUTSIDE

WHISTLING VERY LOUDLY, YOU SCUFF A FEW STRAY LEAVES INTO A PILE -- YOU GRIP THE TRUNK OF THE SAPLING, SHAKING IT SLIGHTLY (AS IF TESTING ITS SOLIDITY).

AT A LOSS FOR ANY FURTHER ACTIVITY, YOU RETREAT INSIDE, BATHED IN SWEAT

YOU REPEAT THIS RITUAL OVER THE COURSE OF SEVERAL DAYS, NOT DARING -- EVEN BRIEFLY -- TO LOOK AT THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR.

ON THE SIXTH DAY, THE SOUND OF THE DOOR OPENING BEHIND YOU MAKES YOU JUMP.

JAKA HAS COME HOME EARLY FOR SOME REASON.

I'm sorry I'm so nosy, but aren't
you hot in that sweater?

**(Your throat has gone dry and clutches
at your words) Nay (coughing). Nay, Cerebus
has spent a lot of time in the southlands.
Cerebus doesn't get hot like most people.**

You're lucky. I've never been outside of Palnu.
My name's Joanne. (an awkward silence)
I guess we're neighbours.

Cerebus is married (this is said too quickly).

(she misses the implication) Hey, me too. (another
awkward silence) Fred — he's my husband — Fred
isn't around much. He travels a lot on business.
(another awkward silence) I get lonesome sometimes.
Fred doesn't like me to (she gropes for an explanation)
He loves me a lot, you know? He likes me to (Fred's
will asserts itself in his absence) I just spend too much
time with my old friends, talking a lot of foolishness
instead of taking care of my responsibilities.

**(this is a very familiar refrain and you muse
aloud) Aye... Jaka's the same way
(Joanne seems to shrink within herself, as if
Fred himself has caught her in a major
transgression) (her withdrawal apparent, you
scramble mentally to recover lost ground)
Uh... she doesn't... she doesn't like Cerebus...
talking to people when she's at work.**

(her eyes widen at this. The blatant lie has reinforced
the tenuous connection. She glances over her shoulder
as if Fred might manifest himself in the kitchen at any
moment) Well, maybe we shouldn't be talking then.

(quickly) Nay. Cerebus wants to talk to you.

(for several moments she wrestles inwardly with this; a
long-suppressed fire reaches her eyes) I don't think
it's fair (she starts at the unexpected edge in her own
voice). I mean, it's just... (barely a whisper) talking.

**Aye. It doesn't mean (you're quoting Jaka now
and feel a twinge of guilt as you do so) you
love him any less. (you can't help yourself;
Jaka's words are your best weapon) After all,
you're his wife, not his prisoner.**

(melting at this, she smiles. Seeing her smile, you melt
in turn) I guess we've got a lot in common, huh?

**(at first you think she's referring to herself
and Jaka; it takes you a moment to merge with
the lie) Aye. (the answer is suited to both
interpretations; a mixture of shame and
exhilaration rises within you)**

As long as we get our responsibilities taken care of
(she is unused to making the rules for herself and
pauses to choose her words carefully) we could talk
some more (unexpectedly, she has found herself
outside Fred's prison; her vertiginous reaction
begs the security of qualification:) Maybe.
(it's okay to be outside the cage, isn't it?)

**(there is a stirring in your groin)
Cerebus would like that.**

(afraid of losing the small victory) Well, okay.

(afraid of losing the small victory) Okay.

(smiling her relief and her gratitude) 'Bye.

(smiling from your groin) 'Bye.





SHE IS RETICENT AT FIRST, listening and smiling. Soon, however, her thin trickle of comment becomes a mighty stream of observation and then a raging torrent of confession. She pours forth the story of her twenty (be still, your throbbing groin) summers of existence. Frequently she edges around her subject, cautious and restrained at its perimeter — the truth straddles the fence of what she is saying and what she cannot, will not, must not say.

She had known Fred all of her life. He was a business associate of her father's, a family friend (practically a relative, she observes — the observation draining the light from her eyes as it is enunciated for the first time). Between her fifteenth and sixteenth years the physicality of onrushing womanhood had taken her (and everyone else) by surprise. Fred became a more frequent visitor in their household and his attentions paid to her, while circumspect, became — unmistakably — different. Her anxiety and confusion at this turn of events were compounded by the fact that she seemed to be the only member of the family to note the change.

When she attempted to broach the subject with her father (whose perfection in her eyes was beyond dispute), she found him to be uncharacteristically ill-at-ease with the topic. He deflected her overtures as best he could, mouthing platitudes and non sequiturs with equanimity. When she persisted, became insistent, he cut her off in mid-sentence and advised her that it was a "woman problem" and told her to "ask your mother".

Her mother, while appearing to misdirect the discussion, was actually quite direct (in her circuitous fashion) with her counsel. She cast malicious deprecations and aspersions on all of the boys whose attentions Joanne had inadvertently engaged. She related the woeful history of Great Aunt Agnes' marriage to a ne'er-do-well, a brigand "silver of tongue and lazy as the day is long". She asserted the tendency of the future to arrive before one was aware that the present was departing. She acknowledged defects in Fred's physical appearance but insisted that "you can't tell a book by its cover".

When Joanne attempted to restore her original inquiry to its intended form, characterizing Fred's attentions as "unwelcome and improper", her mother had slapped her, calling her "ungrateful" and "spoiled". She informed Joanne that Fred was a gentleman who had been instrumental in assisting them to get established in the city, adding that Fred was probably the closest friend her father had in the world. If Joanne couldn't see her way clear to behaving decently towards a man who had been nothing but decent to her family, then... And at this point her mother had burst into tears.

Over a period of tumultuous weeks, Joanne had pieced the conversation together, had realised what was expected of her. Distraught at her inability to break through the barrier her father had erected between them — and around the subject — she watched him, in vain, for any sign of how he felt about the decision she had made. Even on her wedding day, she couldn't tell if he was happy about her betrothal or...

Of course, while you listen to all this — ostensibly attentive and thoughtful — your mind (and your eyes) are elsewhere. The heat wave — the longest in Palnu's history — exists for you as a series of vivid images and an internalized tempest of passion.



"Oh, that breeze sure feels good, doesn't it?"

She **must** know Cerebus can see her breasts. She **must**. She's wearing it on purpose. She wants Cerebus. She wants Cerebus. She wants Cerebus to touch her. She wants Cerebus to make love to her. Maybe it's just an accident. Aye? Nay? How could she **not** know? She likes it. She likes Cerebus to look at her breasts. She isn't happy with her husband. She's happy with Cerebus.

She wants Cerebus to make the first move.

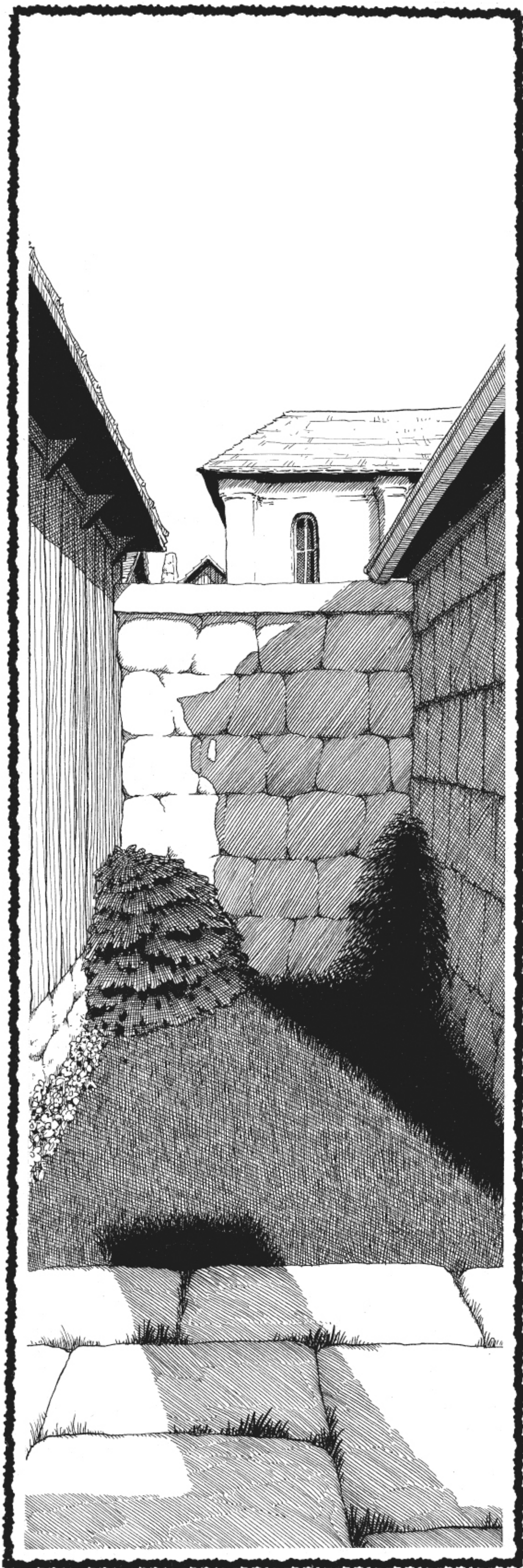
"Goodness, this is your fourth glass of lemonade. You must have a sponge in your stomach."

Just a little bit further and Cerebus will be able to see her nipple. Just a little bit further. She **must** know that

Cerebus can see her breast. She's exposing herself to Cerebus. She wants Cerebus. She wants Cerebus to touch her breast. She wants Cerebus to make love to her. She's just waiting for Cerebus to make the first move. She probably fantasizes about making love to Cerebus the way Cerebus fantasizes about making love to her.

"What was I thinking of, putting a long-sleeve blouse over this? It's boiling today."

Her nipple. Cerebus is looking at her nipple. She knows Cerebus is looking at her nipple. She wants Cerebus to look at her nipple. She's just wondering why it's taking Cerebus so long to make his move. But what if she **doesn't** want Cerebus? What if she slaps Cerebus and then tells Jaka that Cerebus touched her, that Cerebus tried to kiss her?



Over and over the same tortured
ground: does she or doesn't she?

Will she or won't she? In your
imaginings it always happens the same
way: you call her over to the side of
the house to show her something
(but what?) and when she bends down
to look, you embrace her and kiss her.
And then you pull her down onto
the soft, warm grass and caress
one of her soft, perfect...

Over and over the same tortured
ground: does she or doesn't she?

Will she or won't she?

So absorbed are you in your anguished
speculations it escapes your notice that
the heat wave has, at last, broken.
Joanne wears more modest coverings
which serve only to inflame your
interest further.

**They're under there.
Cerebus knows what they look
like and they're under there.**

You think of me from time to time.

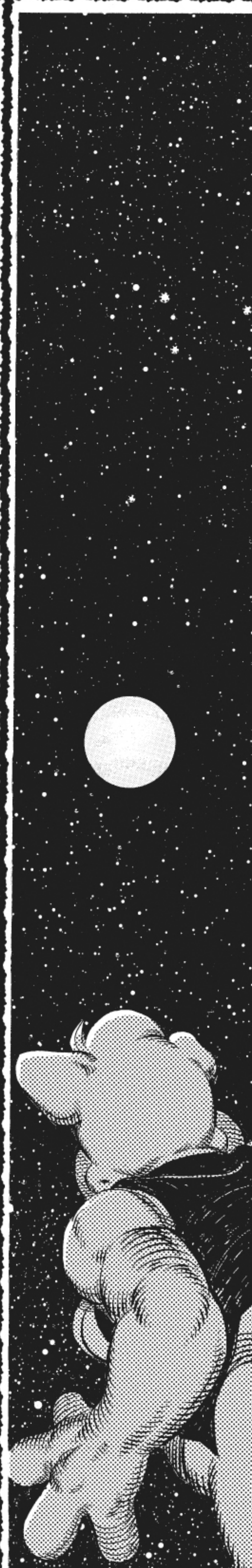
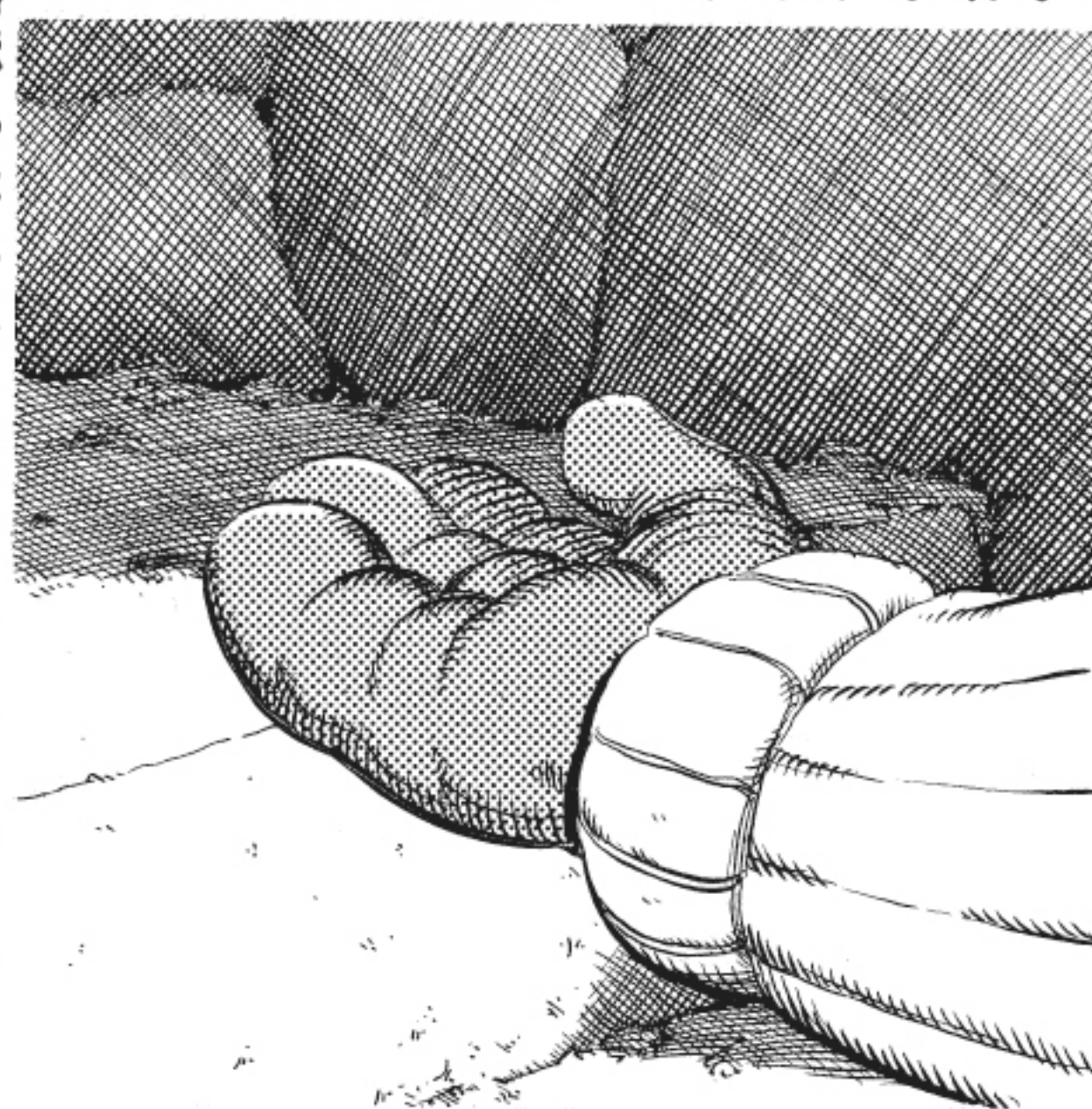
**We have a deal, right?
Jaka is happy with Cerebus
no matter what.**

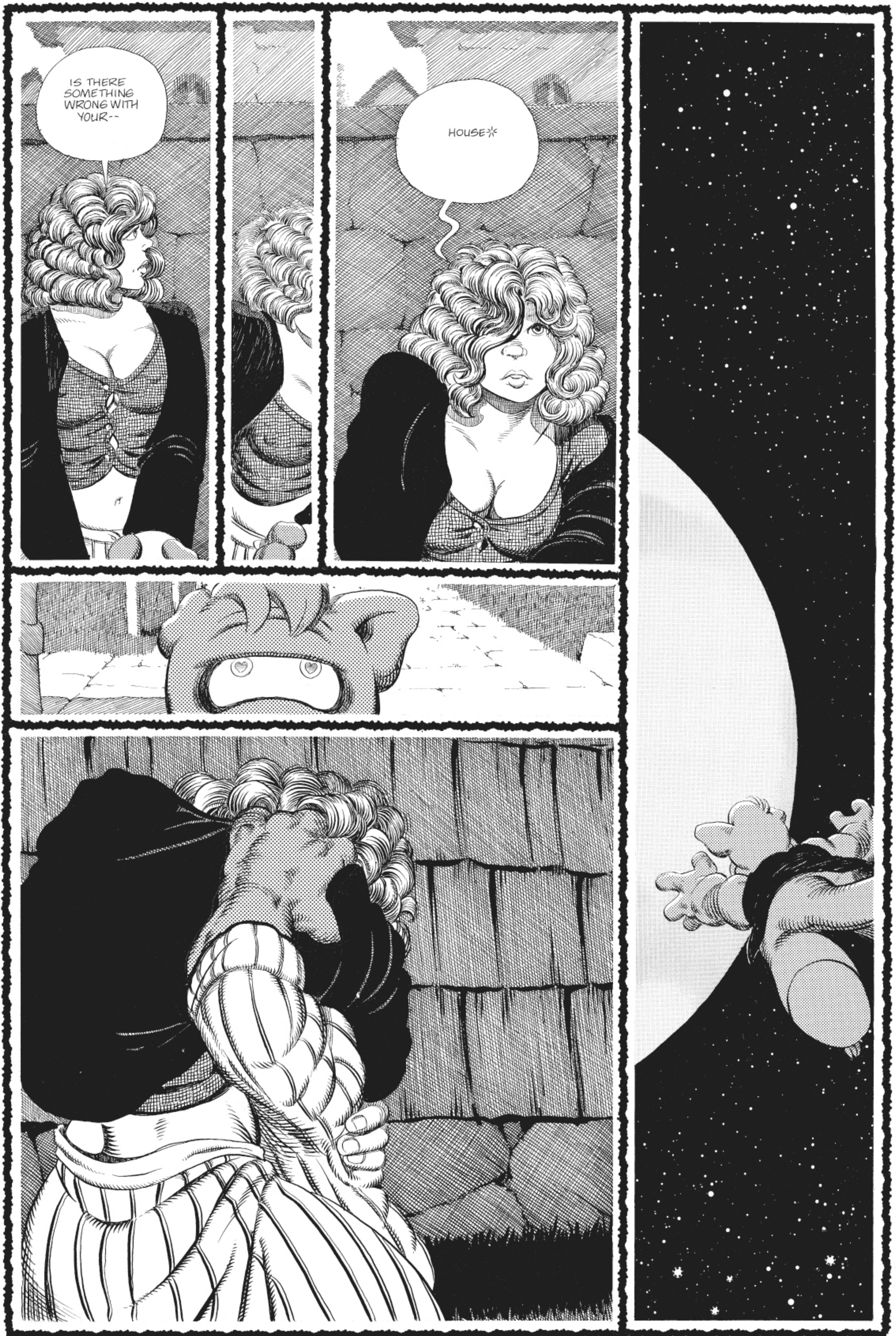
The only voice in your
head is your own.

The first crisp, cool morning of
autumn awakens you to the fact that
the window of opportunity is
closing swiftly.



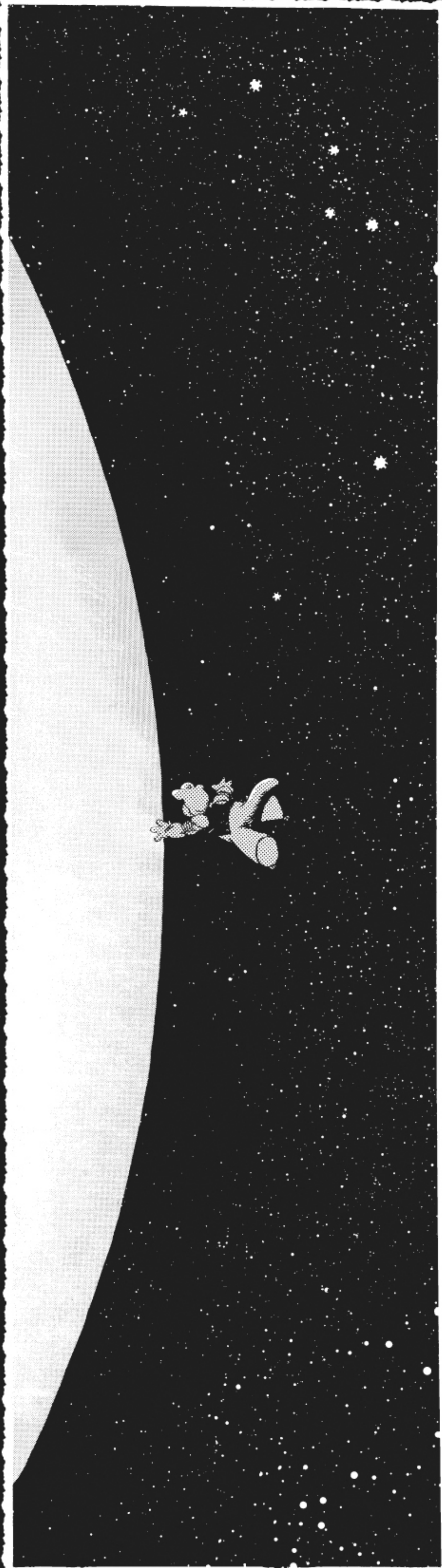
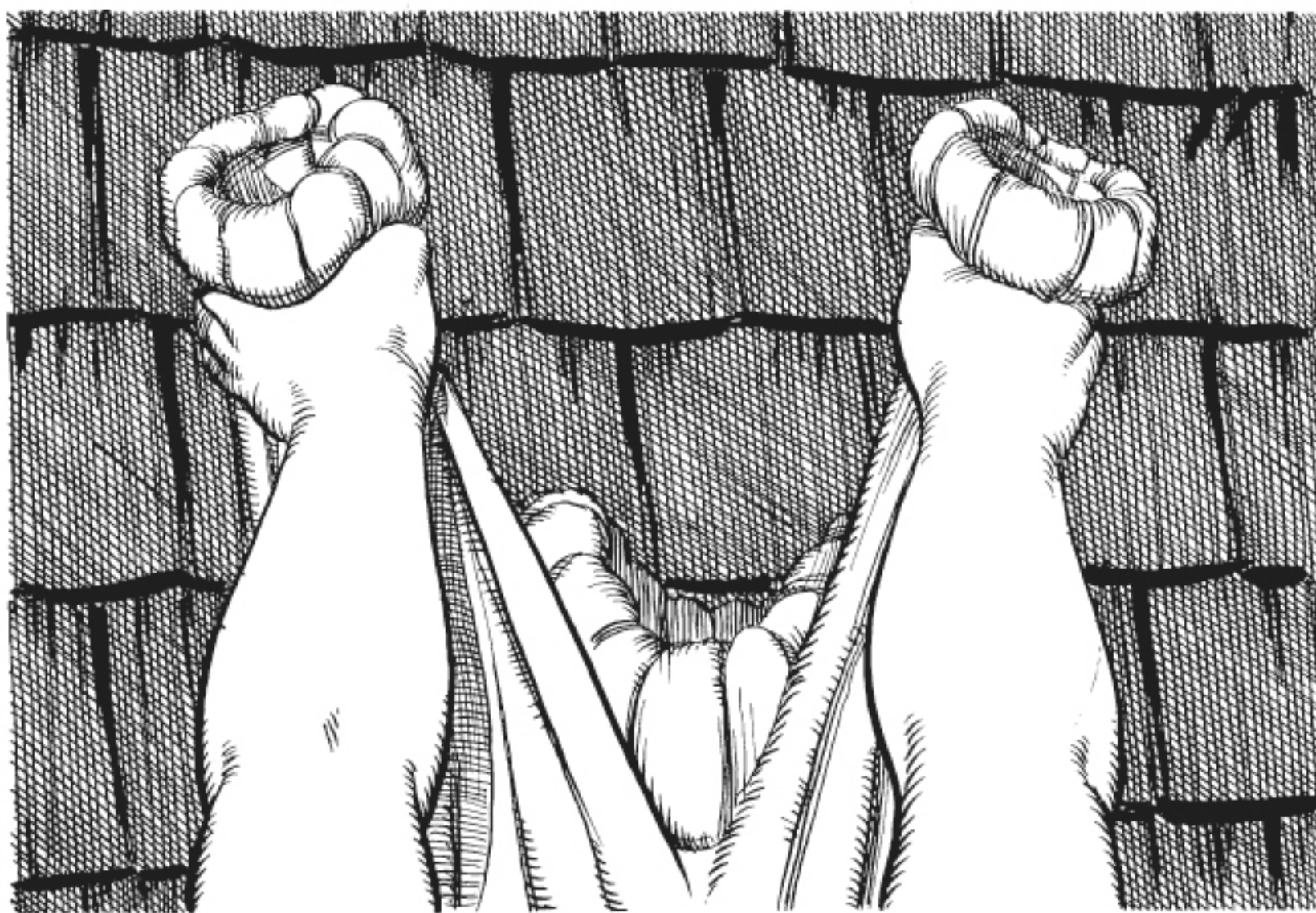


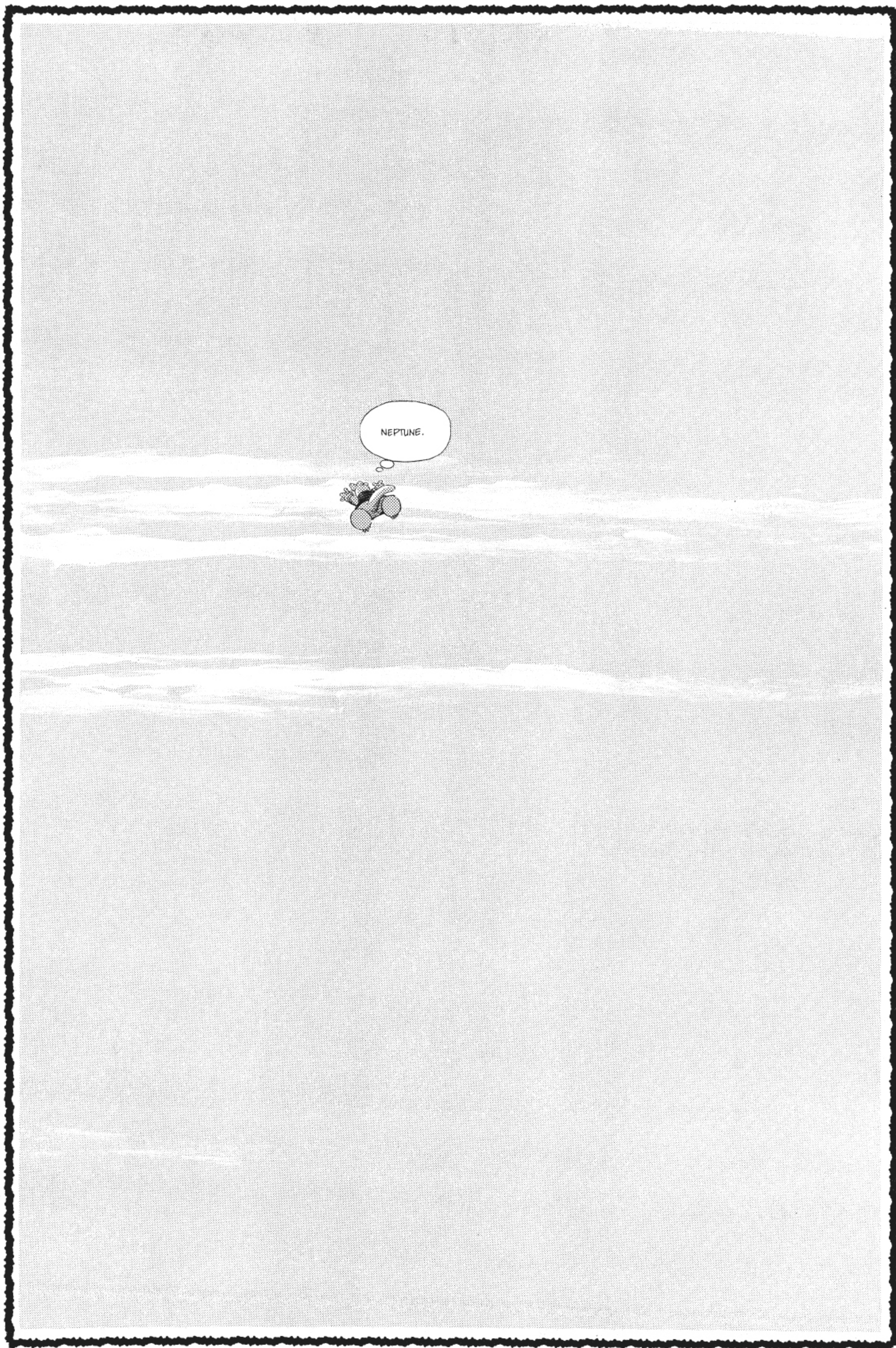




IS THERE
SOMETHING
WRONG WITH
YOUR--

HOUSE*







IT IS THE
FOURTH
LARGEST
OF THE SPHERES
OF THE GODS.

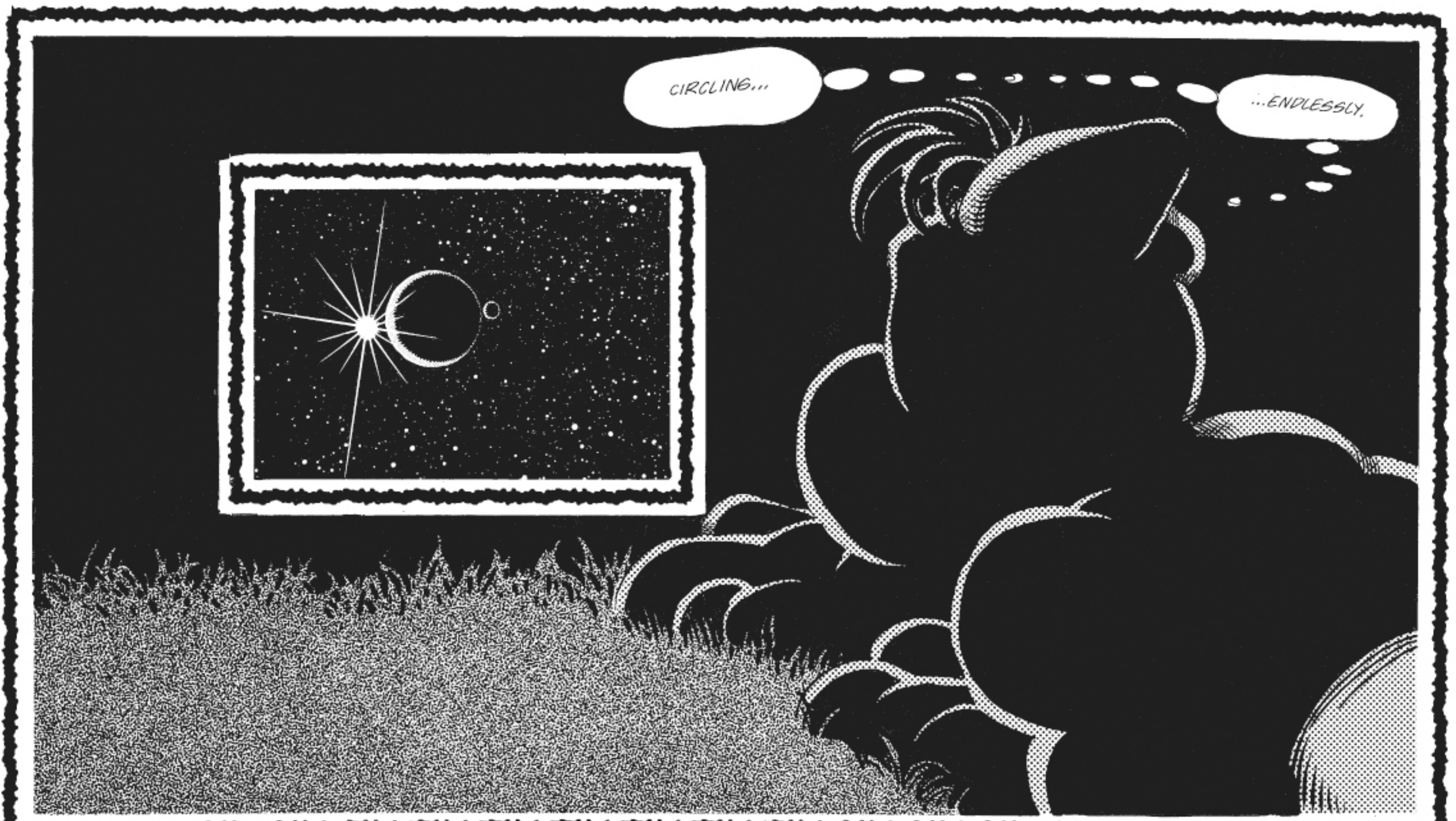
FOUR TIMES
THE SIZE
OF THE
EARTH.

ITS CENTER
IS EXTREMELY
HOT.

ITS ATTRACTION
IS STRONGEST
AROUND THE
MIDDLE AND
WEAKEST AT
THE TOP AND
BOTTOM.

AS IT ROTATES,
IT SWEEPS THIS
ATTRACTION
AROUND IT.

A SMALL COMPANION
--THE COLDEST PLACE
AMONG THE SPHERES OF
THE GODS-- CIRCLES
IT ENDLESSLY....



CIRCLING...

...ENDLESSLY.



WHAT ARE
WE GOING
TO DO?

AYE...

YOU SAID,
"WE HAVE TO
KEEP IT A
SECRET"

AND SHE
ASKED:
(TREMBLING
WITH FEAR)

"KEEP WHAT
A SECRET?"

AND YOU
ANSWERED...?

"WHAT WE
JUST DID."

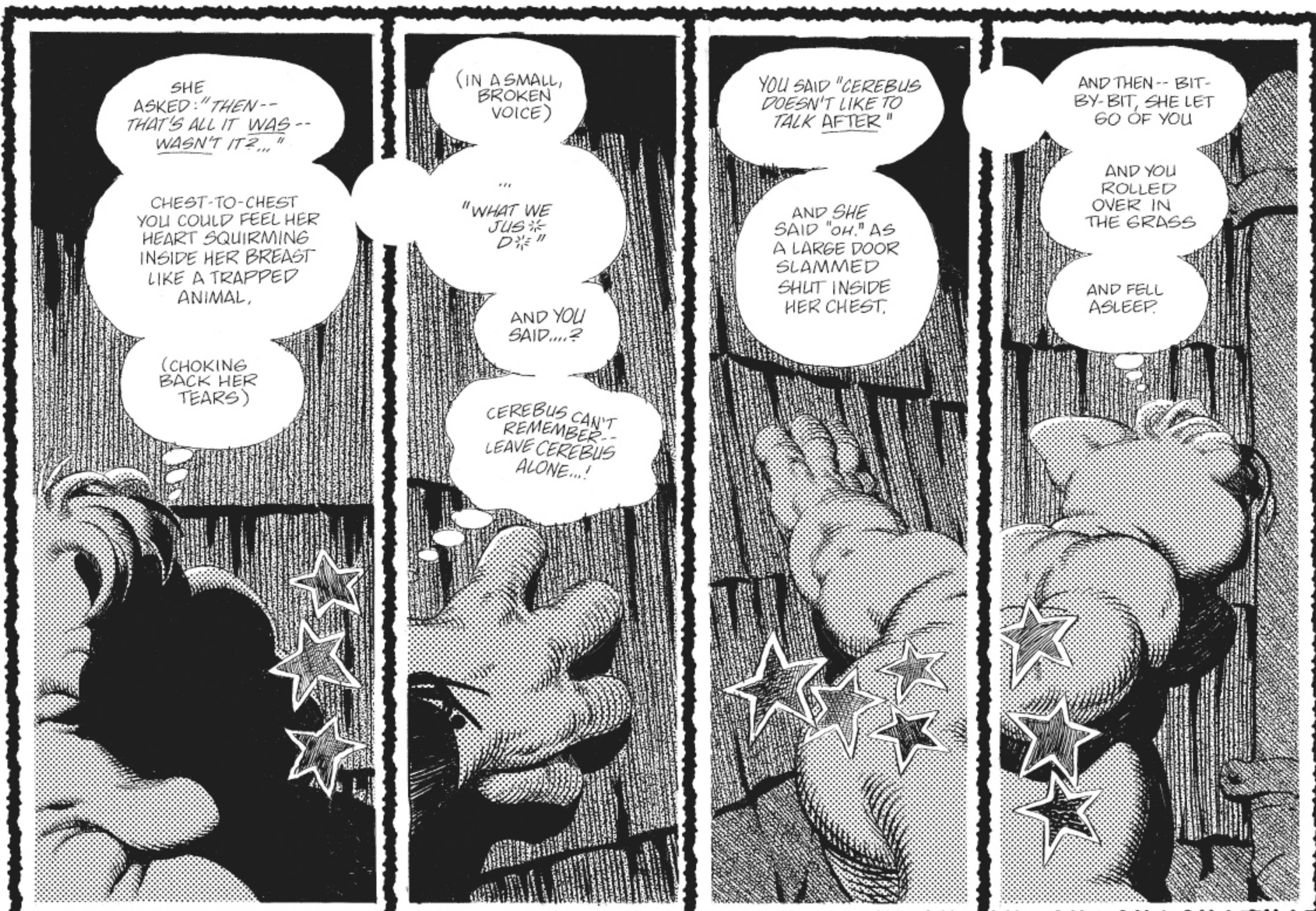
(THINKING
TO YOURSELF
"STUPID LITTLE
SLUT")

CEREBUS' BACK
HURTS.

AND SHE
ASKED...?

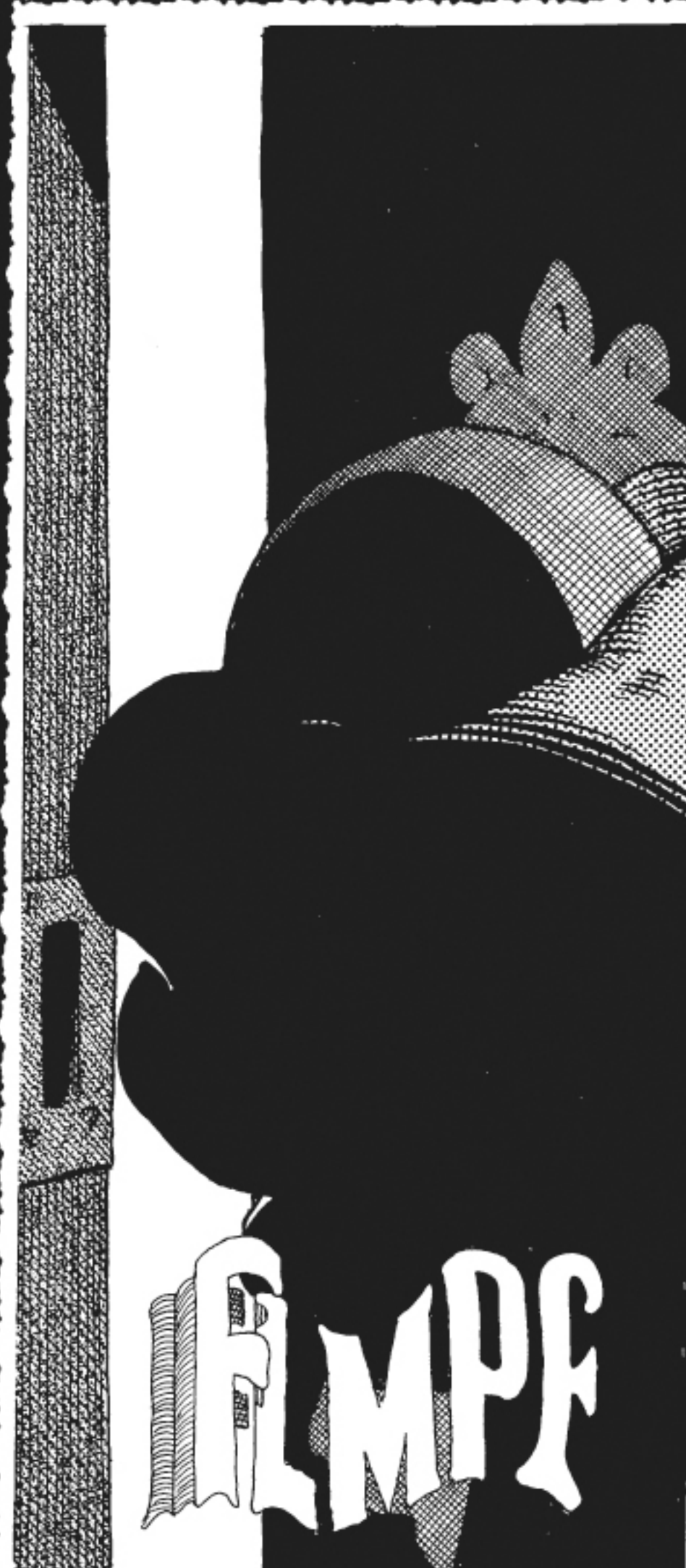
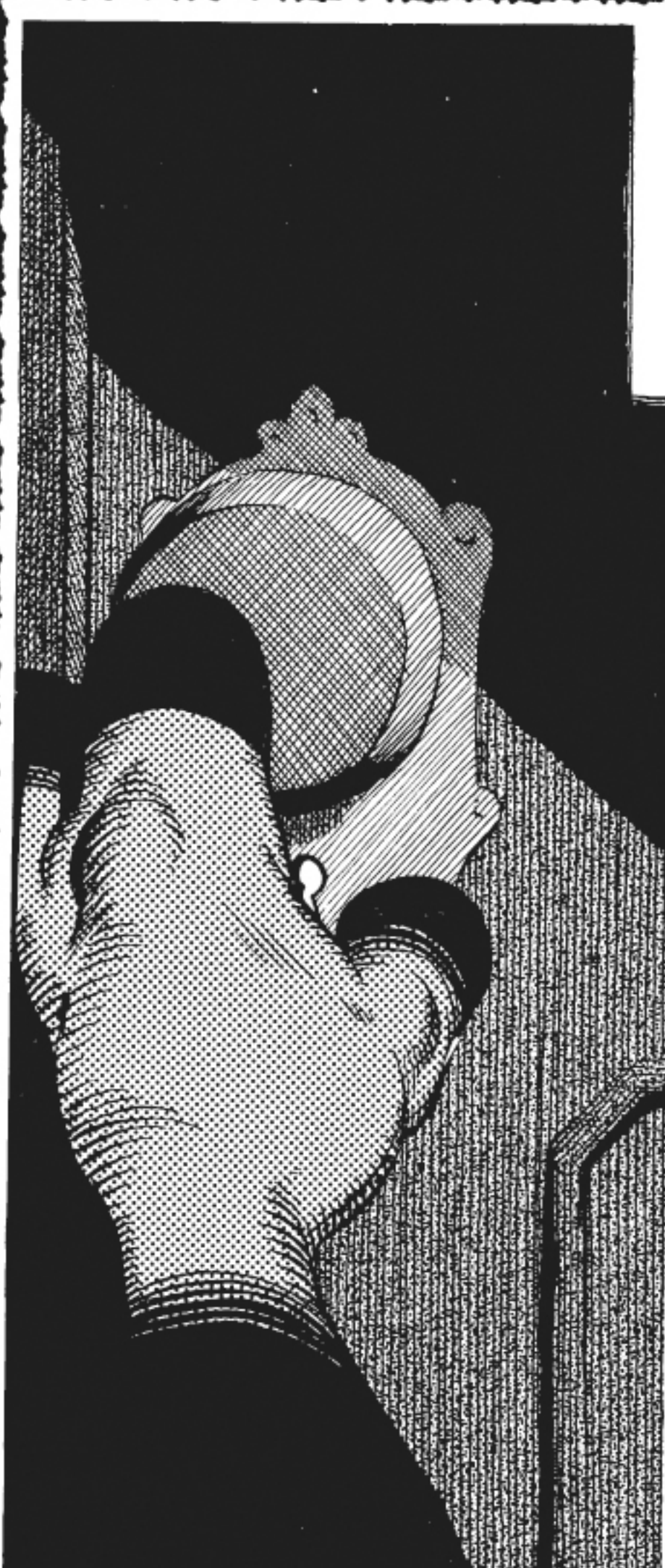
CEREBUS
CAN'T
REMEMBER.

SOMETHING
STUPID...

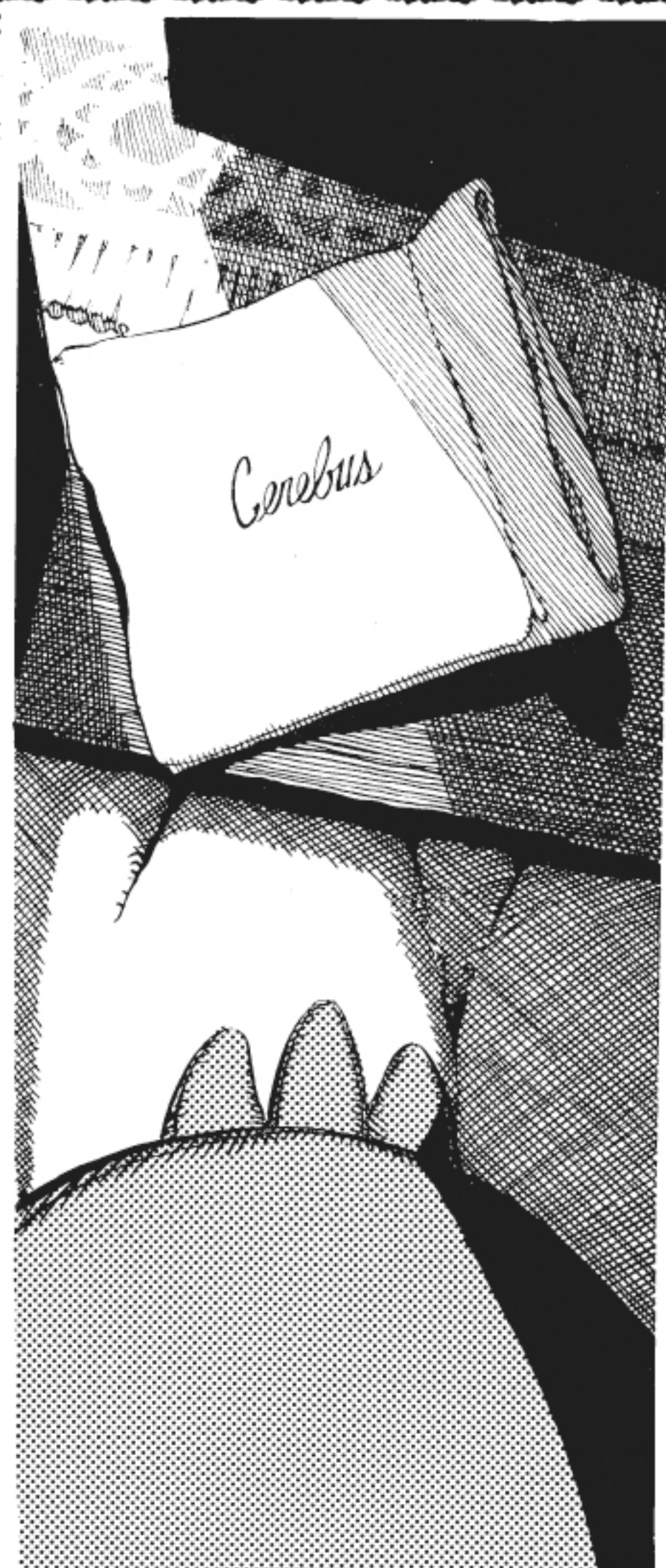




"HOURS
AGO."



FLMPF



Corebus



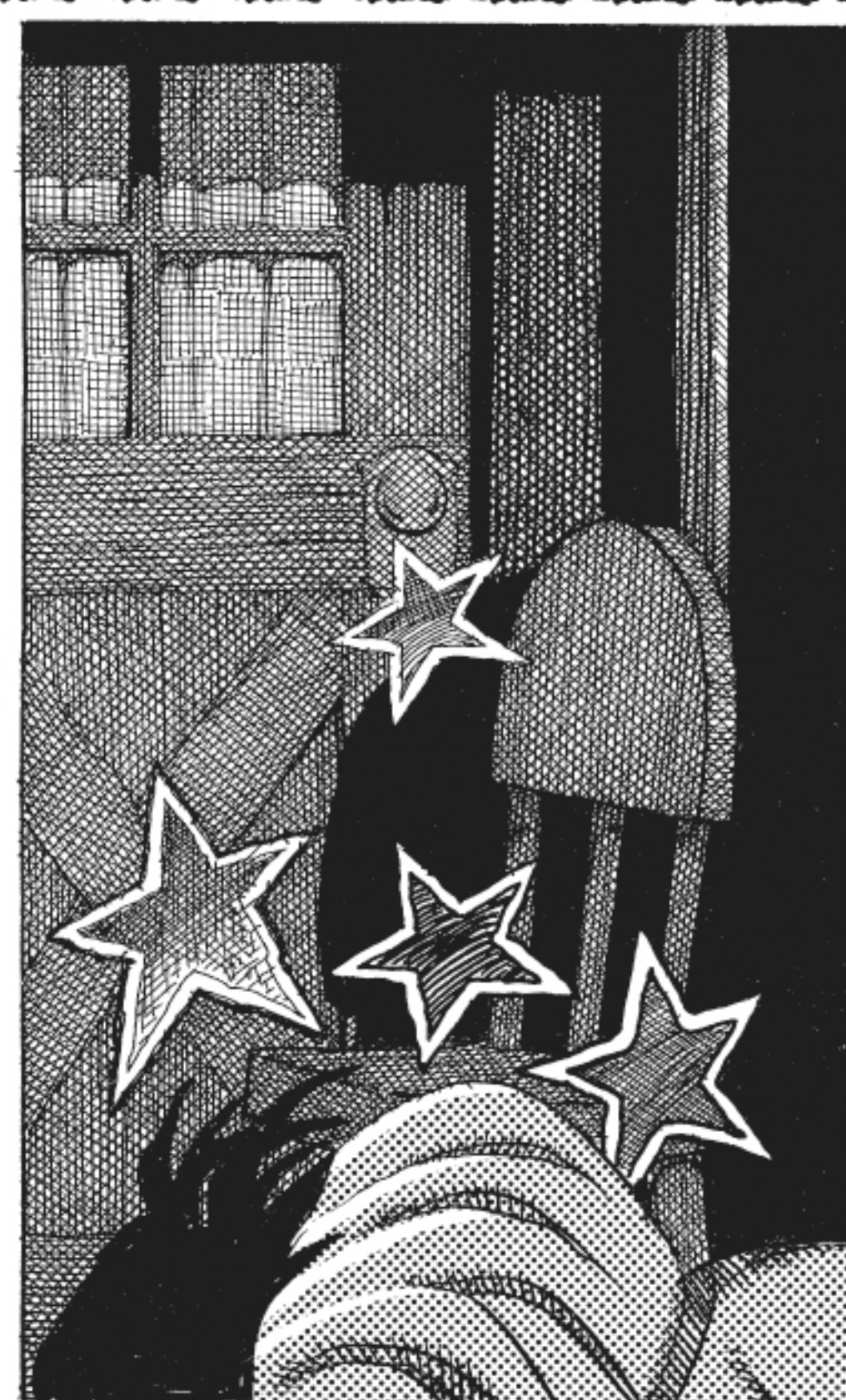
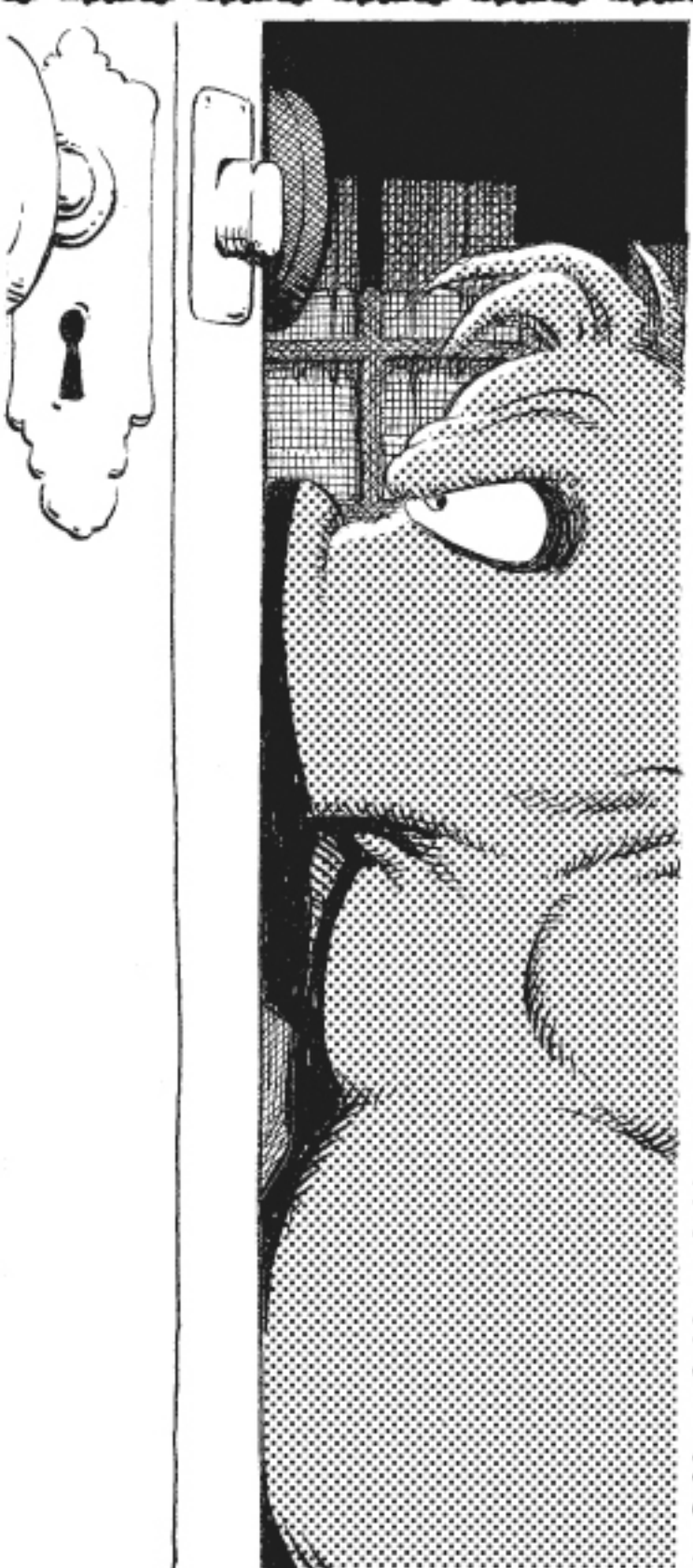
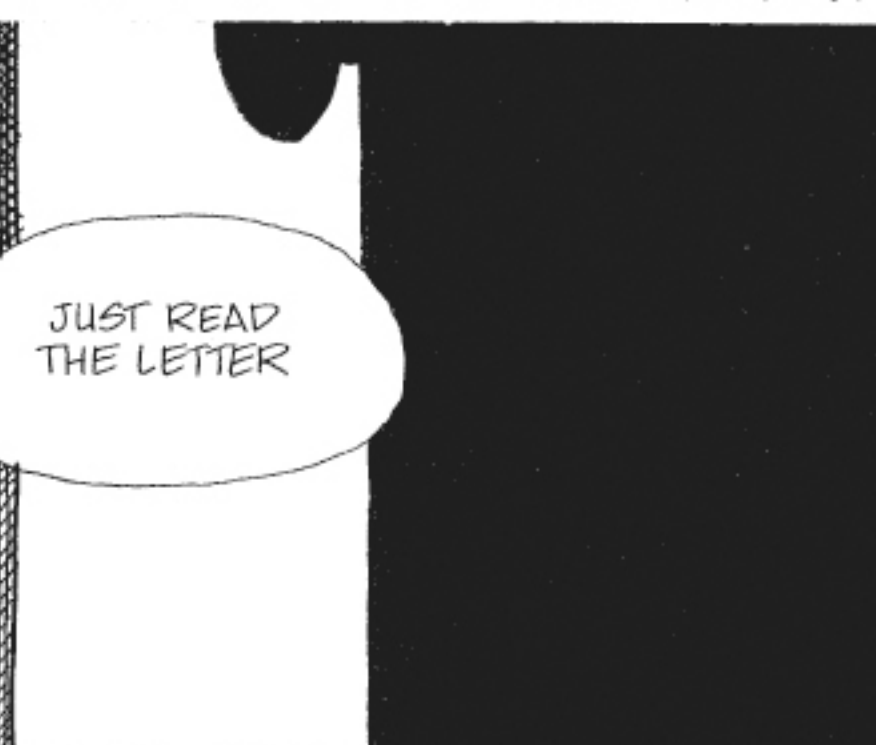
THAT'S JAKA'S
HANDWRITING
ALL RIGHT.

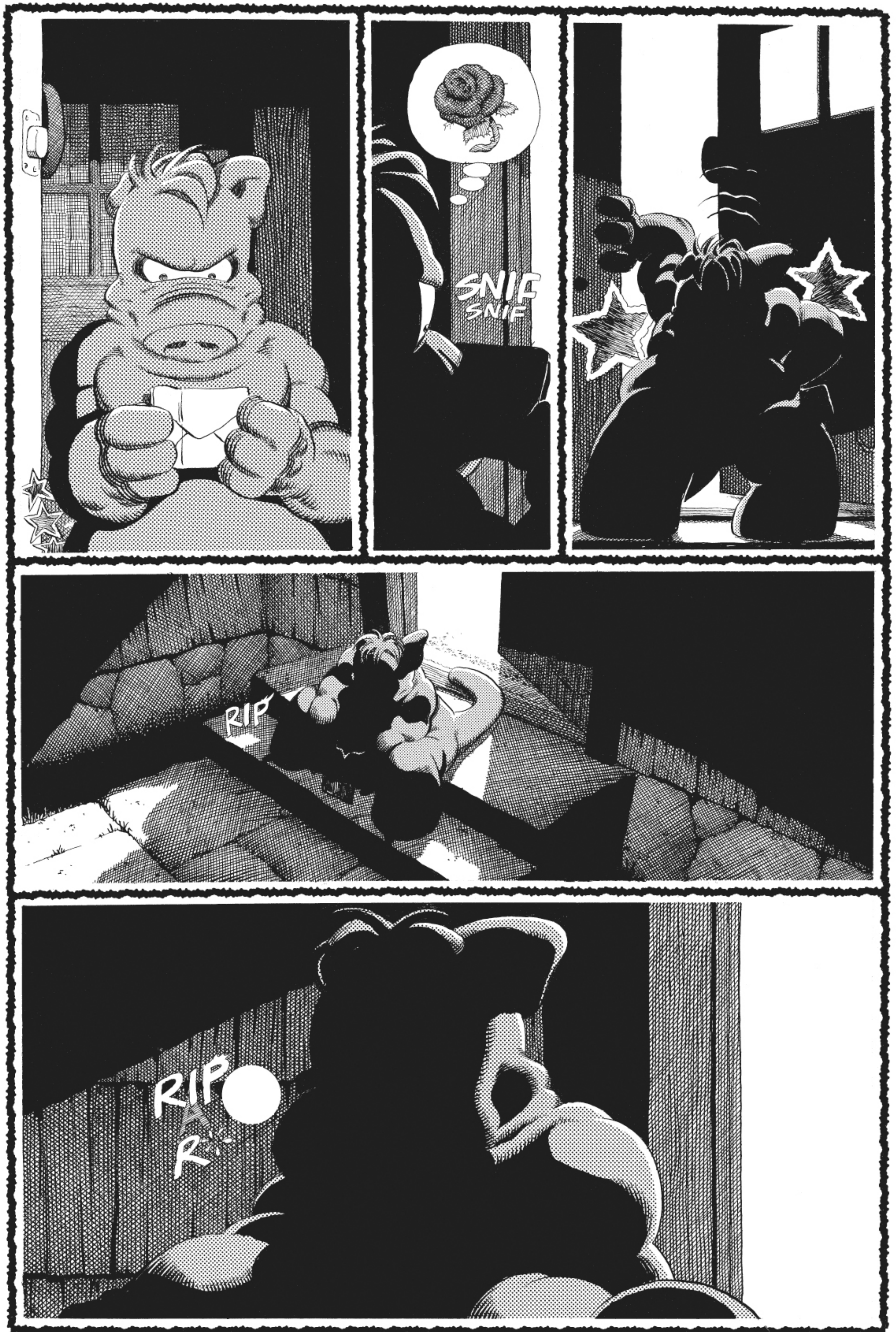


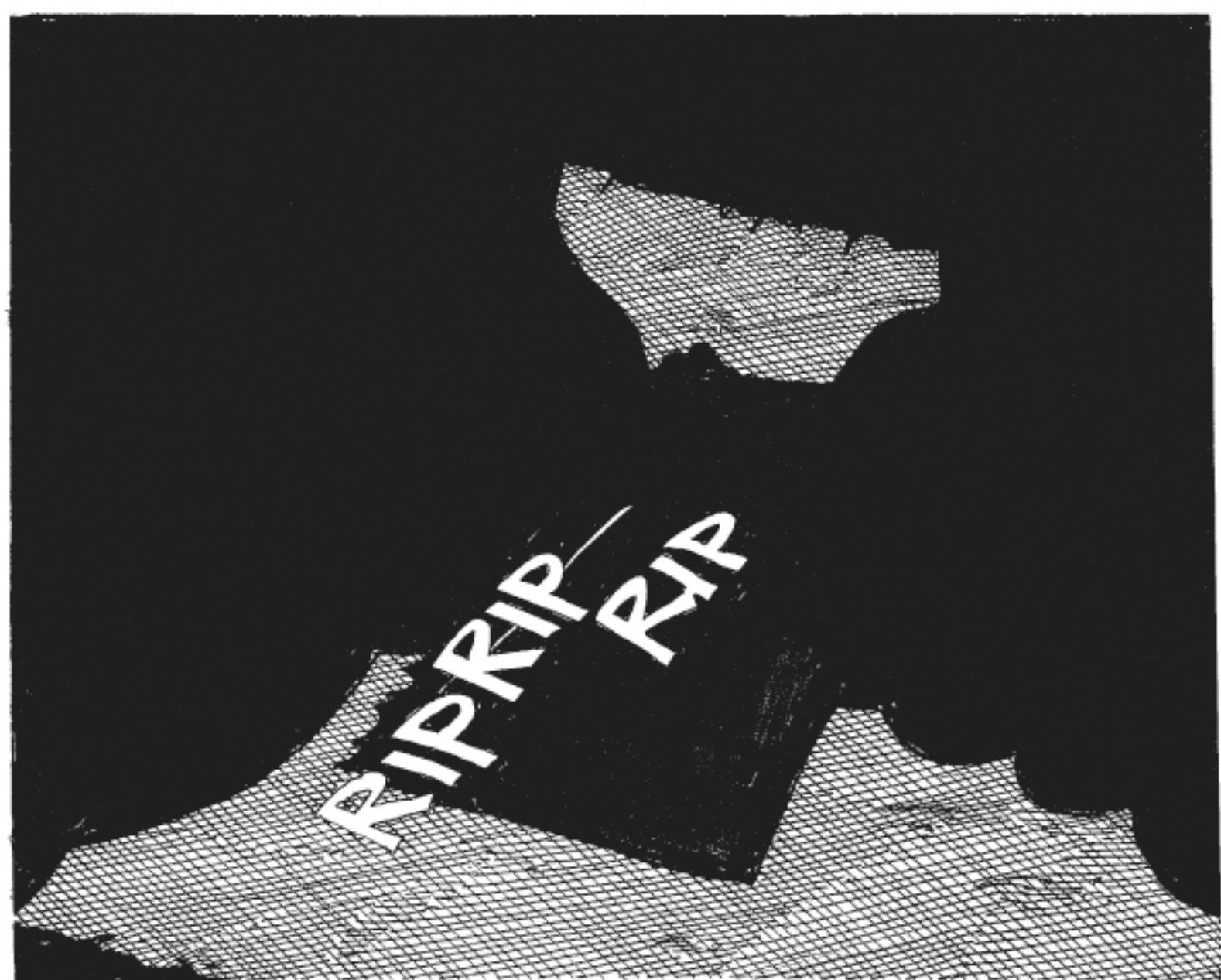
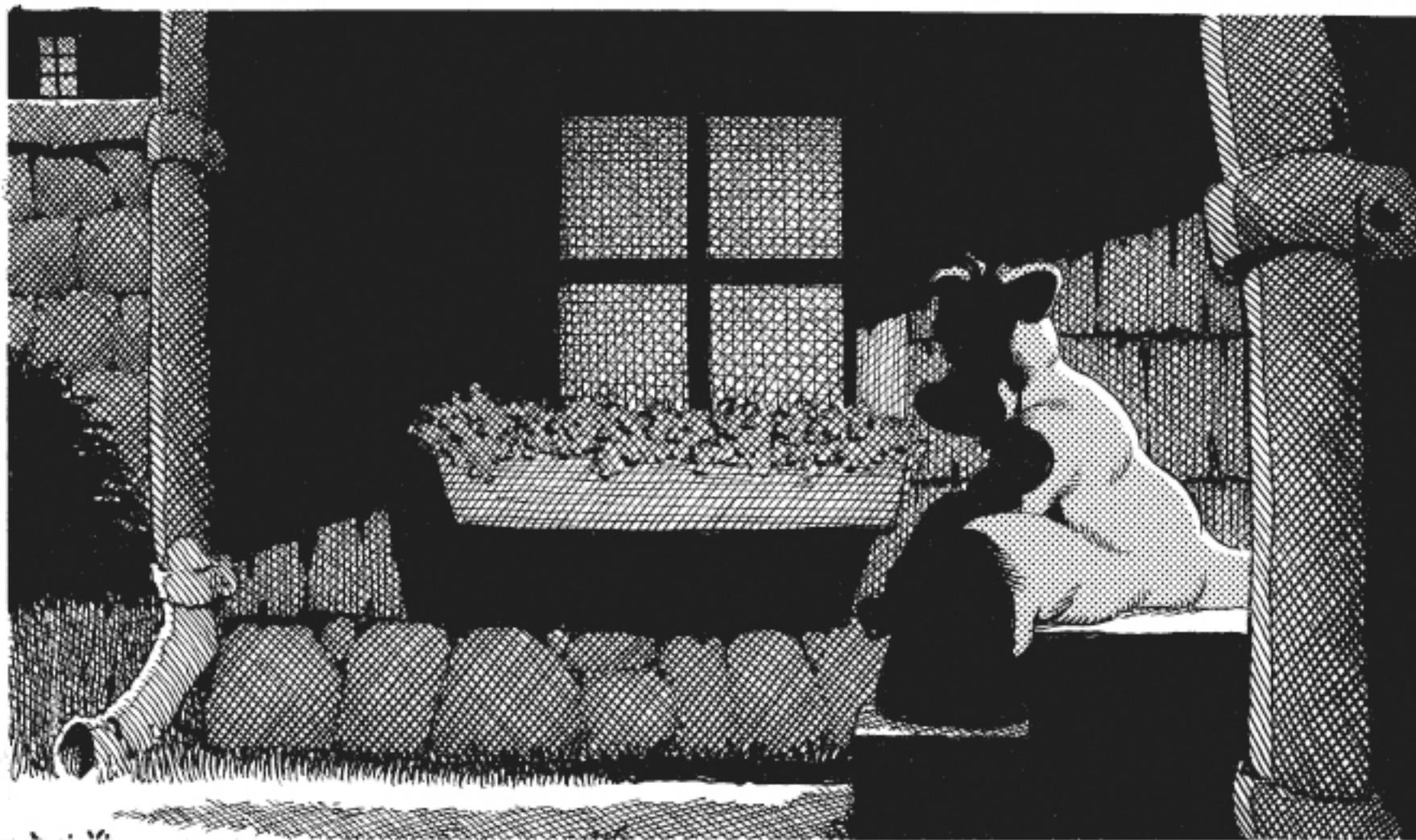
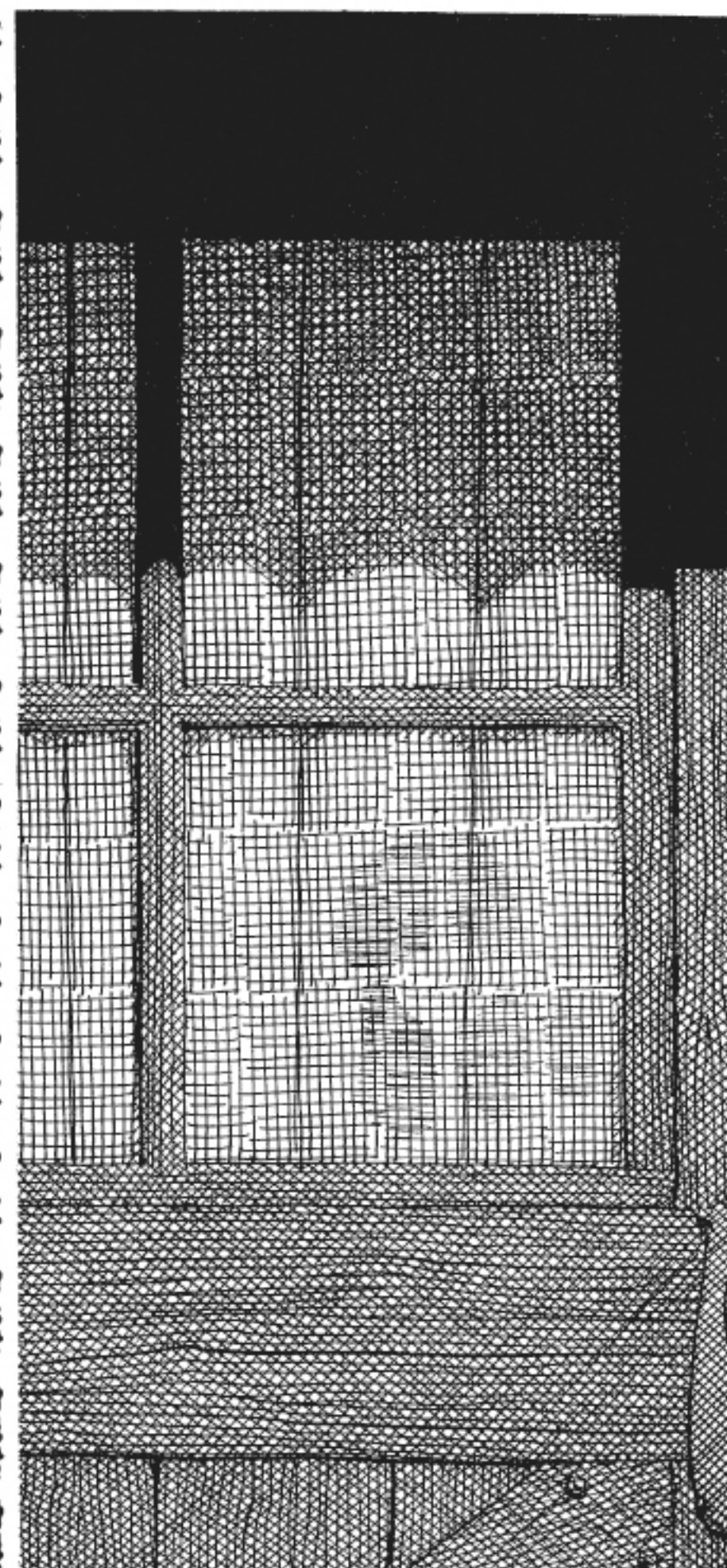
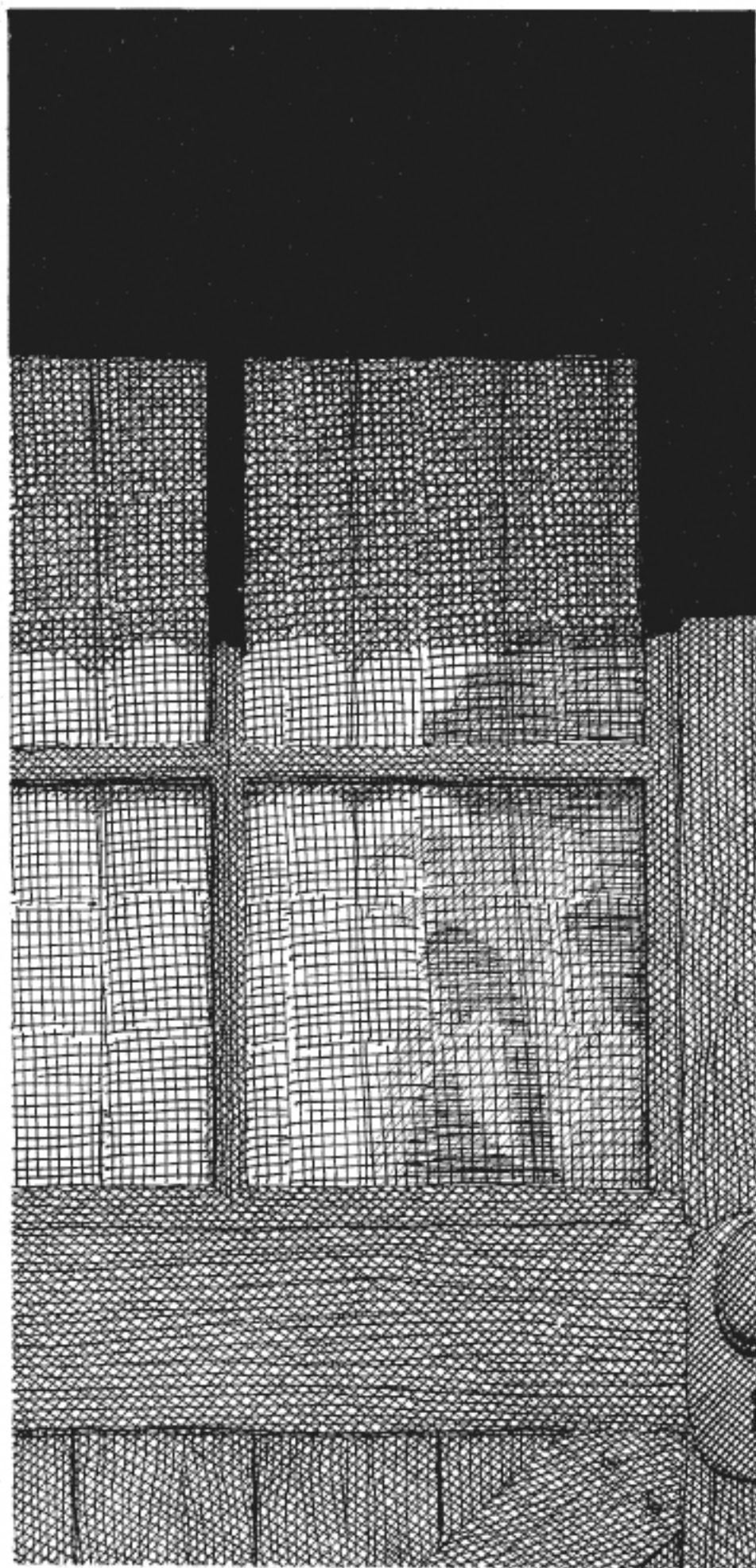
WELL?

Corebus

AREN'T YOU
GOING TO
OPEN IT?





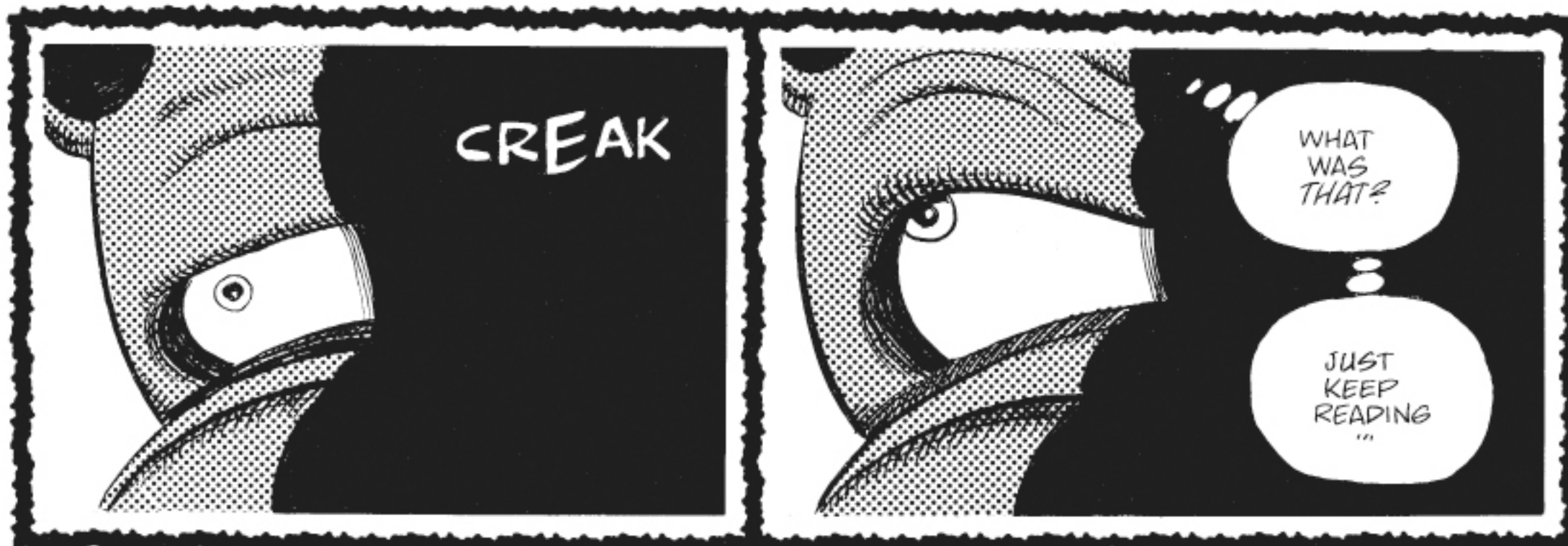


My Dearest, darling Cerebus -
Whenever I try to tell you how

happy I am to be with you, you
always get the strangest look in your eyes and change
the subject--but it's true! Being with you is the only

thing that makes me happy. I watch you all the time. I know all of your
moods by sight. I knew something had changed when you started staring out
the window at the house next door. What a pair we would have seemed if anyone
had walked in on us! You, there, staring at the house next door and me, here,
staring at you. Of course, I never once had to wonder what was on your
mind. The look on your face told me all I needed to know--I know

that
of...



that look on your face told me all I needed to know. I know
that look so well--after all, you used to look at me that way. I
finally met Joanne. I know what that look is--

My pet Joanne

--we both happened to be outside and I thought I would introduce
myself.

CREAK

I've never seen such a look of love mingled with fear on a girl's face before. "It's just talking," she said. "We just talk." And then she cringed as if she expected to be hit. I didn't know what matter to me when Made Love every when I was with to mention him) Rick (forgive me, I know you hate for me erbial Green-Eyed Monster. Your happiness is all that's important to me. I wanted to tell her that.



When she saw I wasn't going to hit her, that look of fear and love turned to one of anger and hate and she said,



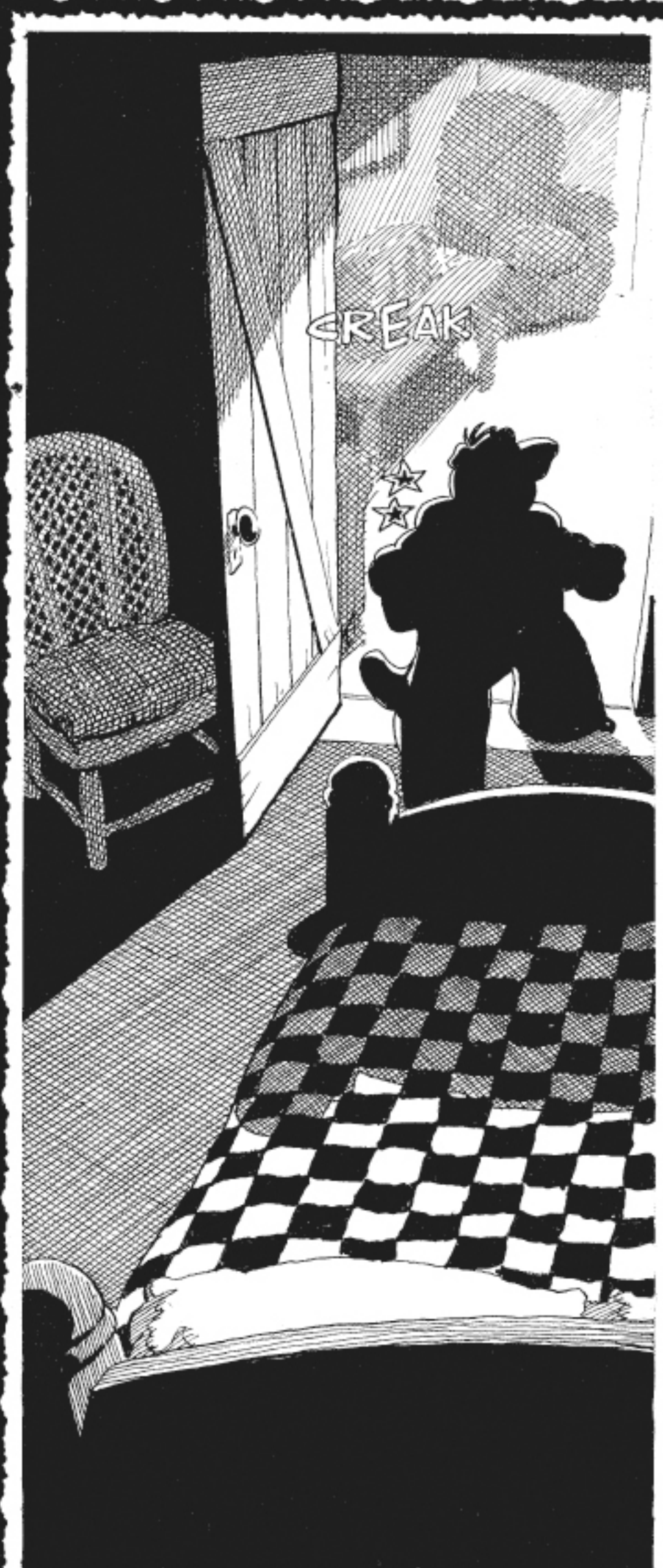
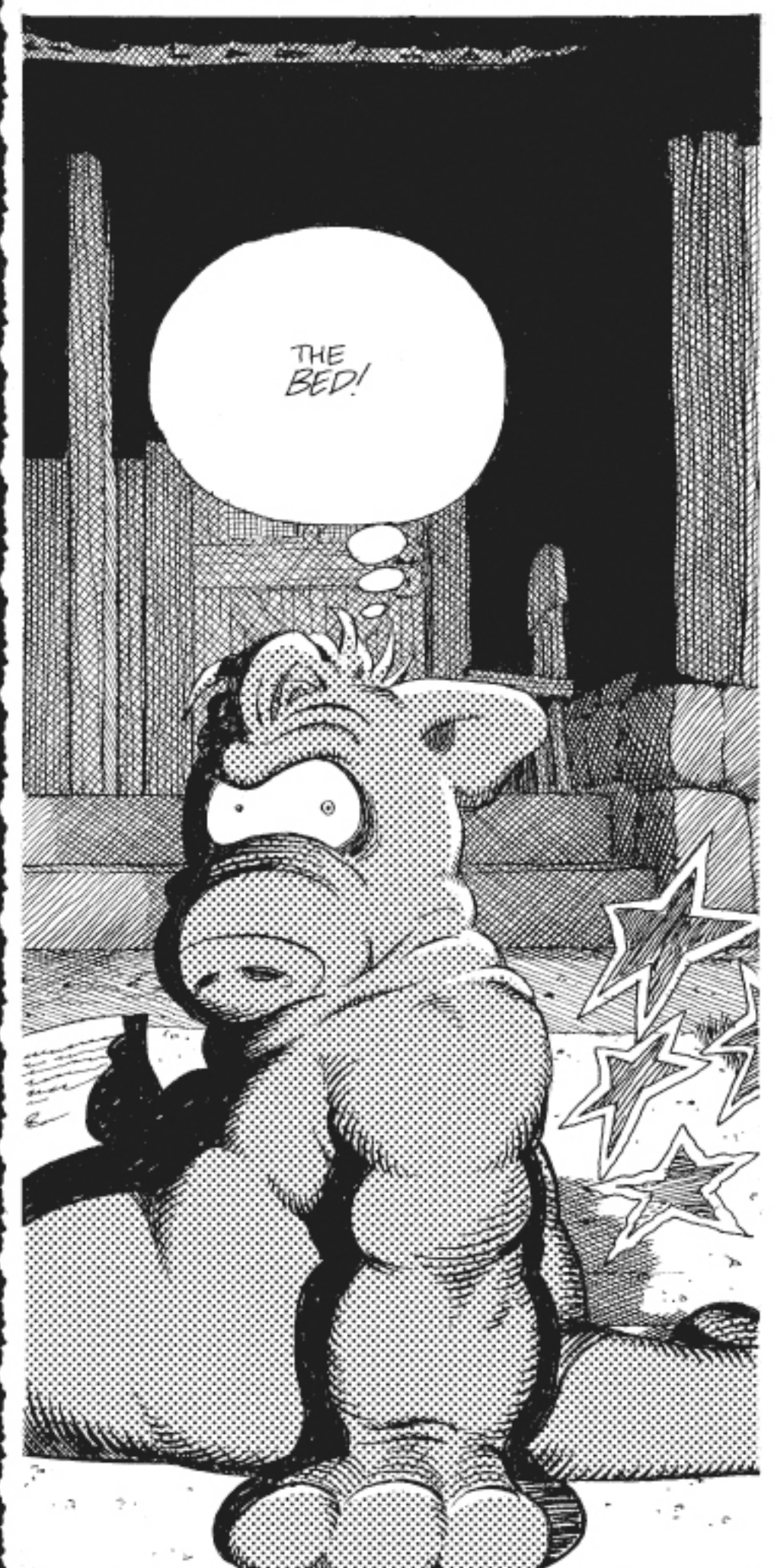
and then I realised, the CREAK I watched you watching her house that my happiness had blinded me to the fact that your happiness now lies elsewhere - with Joanne.

I can't leave you.
I can't begin to think of a life with someone else or even somewhere else. My only happiness is by your side.
I love you, Corebus my darling - forever and forever.
I never imagined I could be as happy as I've been these last two years

Forgive me,
Jaka

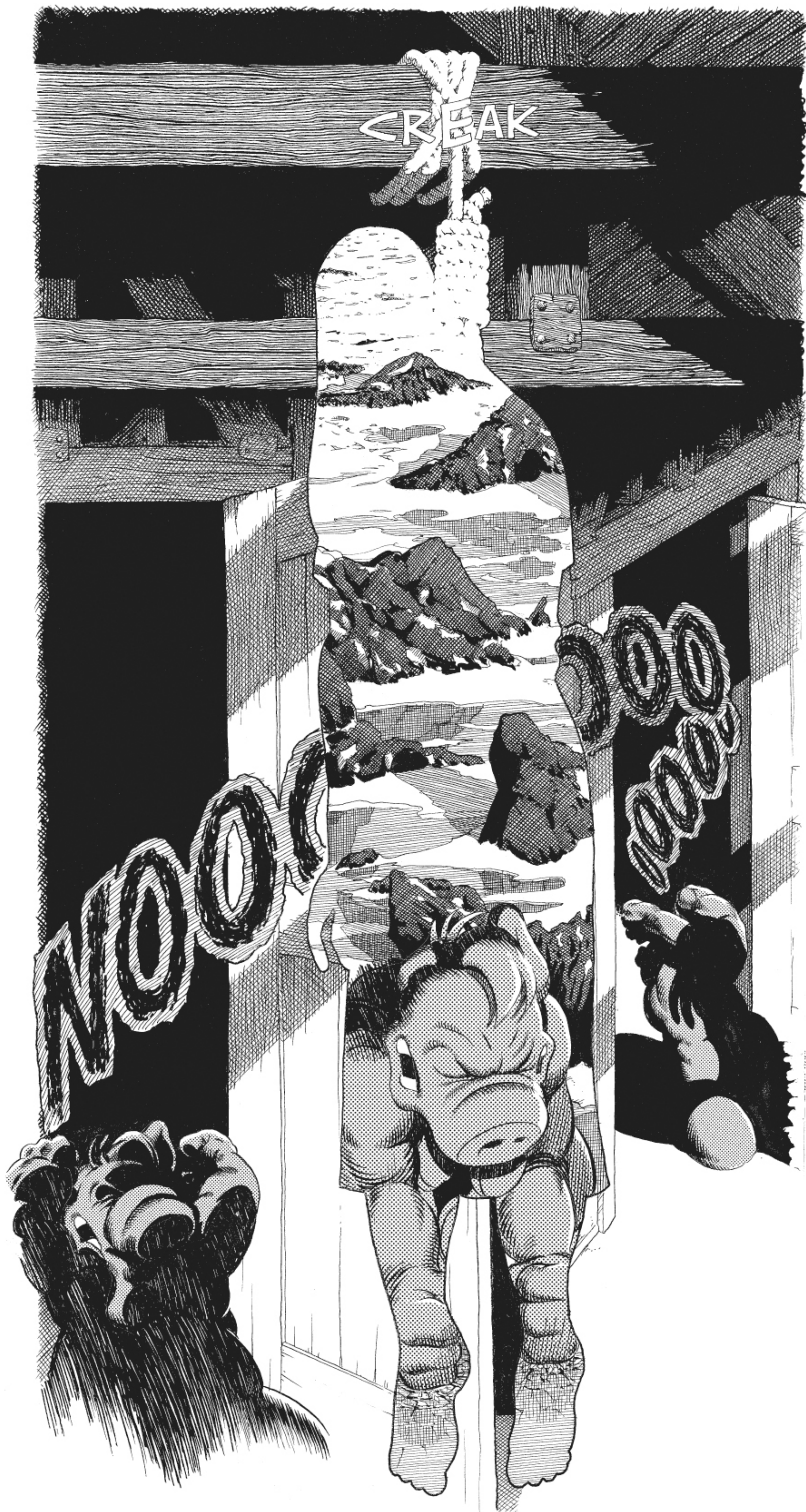
"FORGIVE ME"

"JAKA"



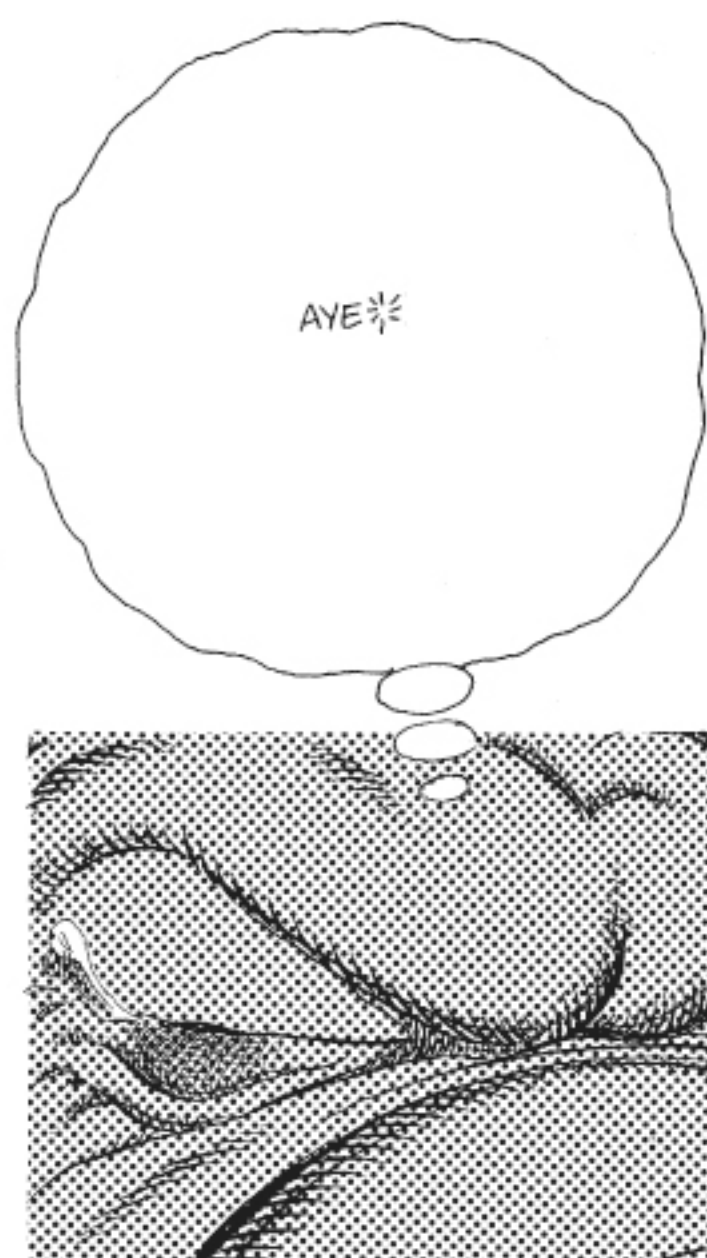
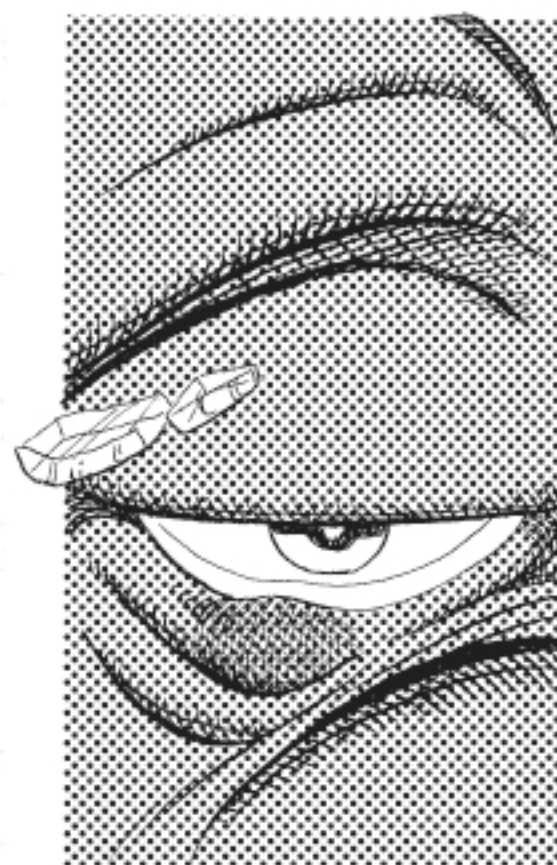








GIVE...?



AYE*

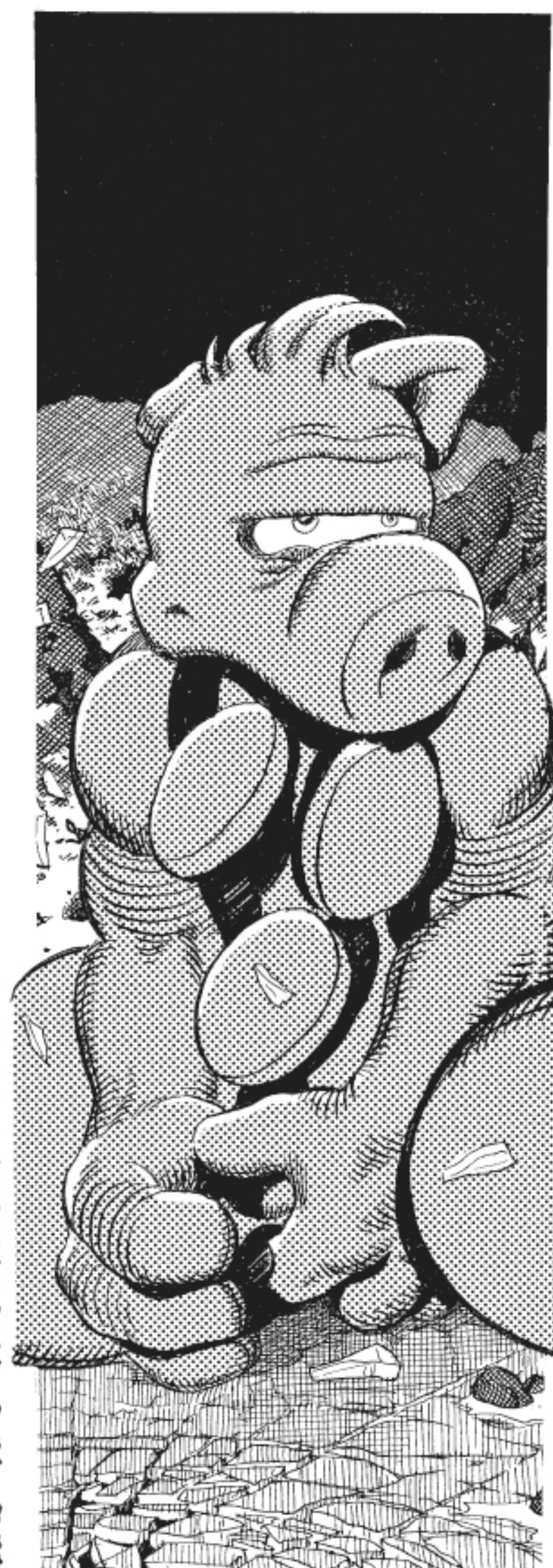


NO.

YOU
DON'T.

SEE -- I
KNOW YOU
BETTER
THAN THAT.

SIT
UP.



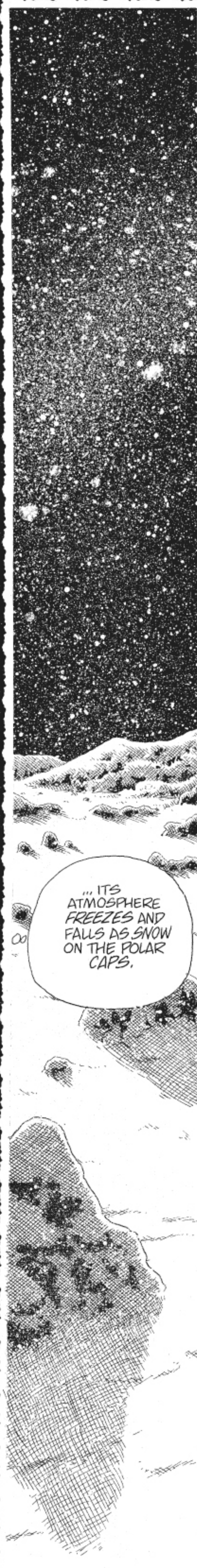


PLUTO.

OF THE SPHERES
OF THE GODS, IT IS THE
MOST DISTANT FROM
THE SUN. IT IS ALSO
THE SPHERE WITH
THE LEAST MASS.

THE ODDBALL SPHERE,
THE HERMIT SPHERE--
ITS ORBIT TILTED
SEVENTEEN DEGREES
ABOVE THE ORBITAL
PLANE OF THE OTHER
EIGHT.

AS IT MOVES
AWAY FROM
THE SUN...



... ITS
ATMOSPHERE
FREEZES AND
FALLS AS SNOW
ON THE POLAR
CAPS.



AT ITS FURTHEST
POINT FROM THE SUN
IT IS SO COLD THAT THE
ENTIRE ATMOSPHERE
"FREEZES OUT"

AND PLUTO
IS NOTHING MORE
THAN A BALL OF
ICE AND ROCK ADrift
IN THE HARD VACUUM
OF SPACE...

LOOK
BEHIND
YOU.

CHARON.

PLUTO'S MOON--
FULLY HALF THE
SIZE OF PLUTO
ITSELF...

SO LARGE THAT
PLUTO AND CHARON
ORBIT EACH OTHER,
SWINGING EACH
OTHER AROUND A
COMMON BALANCE
POINT...

SO
CLOSE THAT THEY
SHARE A COMMON
ATMOSPHERE (WHEN
THAT ATMOSPHERE
EXISTS, ANYWAY).

TRULY THE
ODDBALL SPHERES
OF THE GODS.

AND YOU STILL
DON'T UNDERSTAND,
DO YOU? YOU
ARE PLUTO.

IN YOUR IRREGULAR
ORBIT, YOU WARM
SLIGHTLY AND THEN
FREEZE ONCE MORE
INTO THE AIRLESS,
BARREN EXISTENCE
YOU'VE ALWAYS
KNOWN.

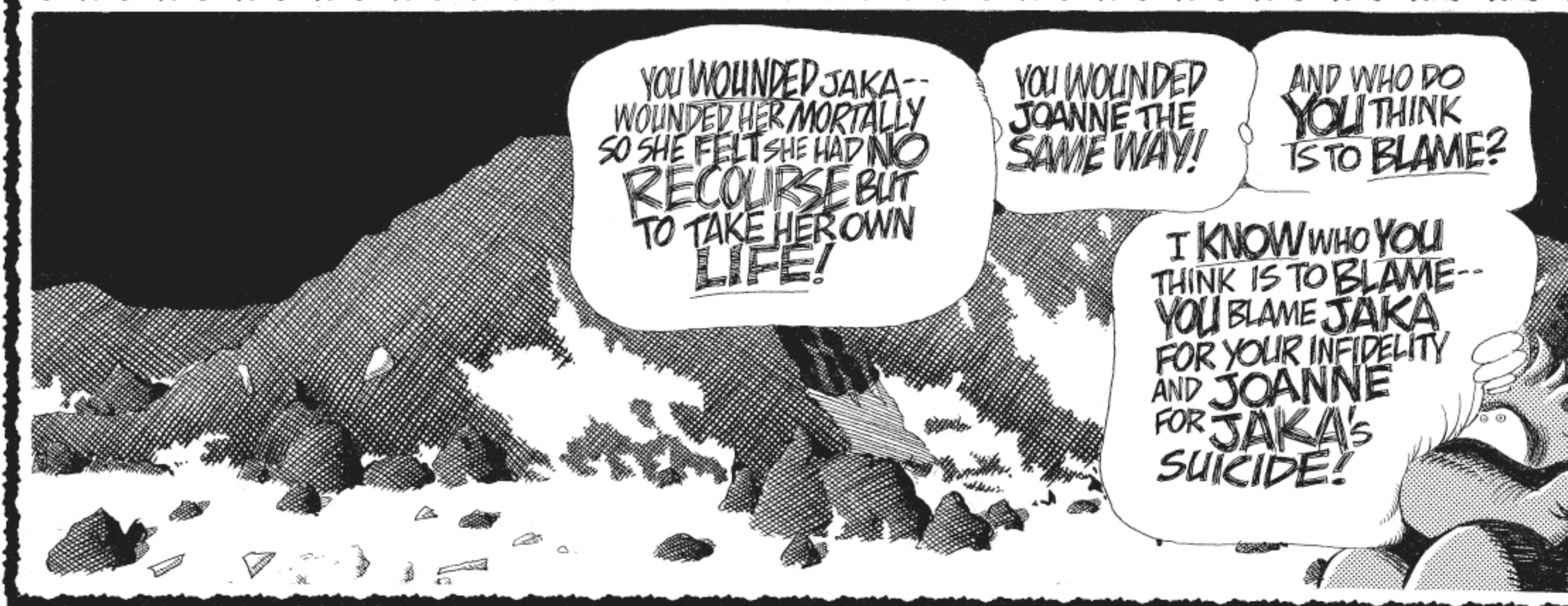
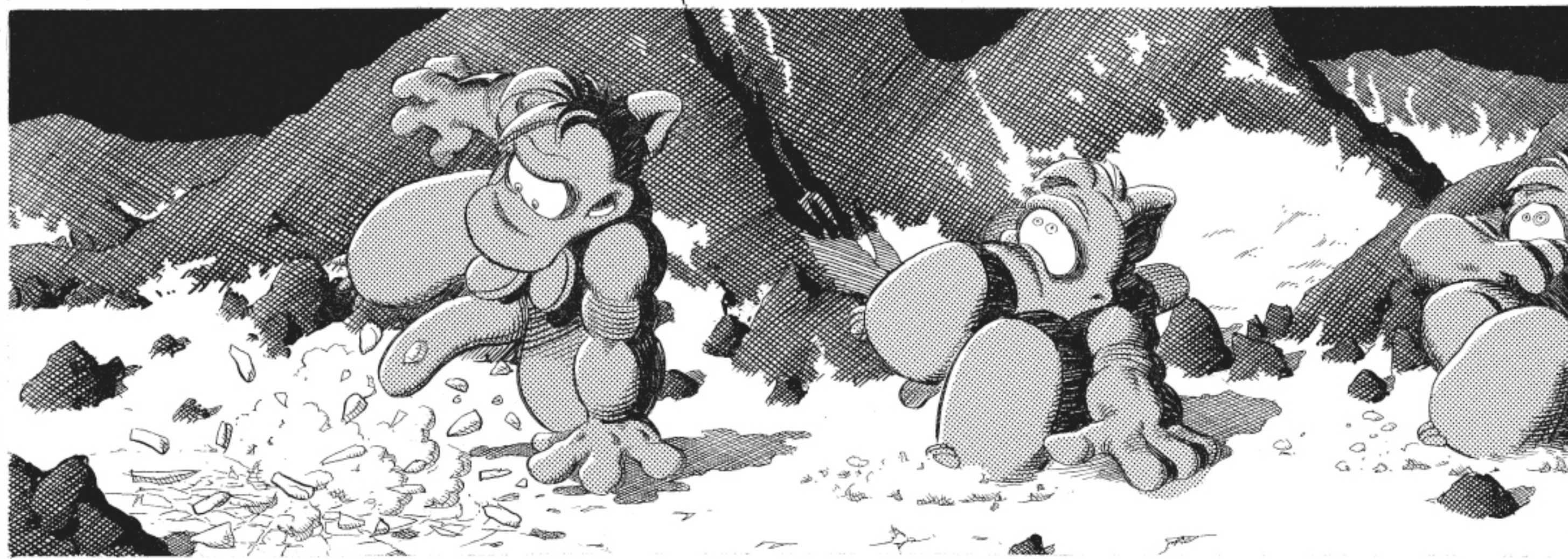
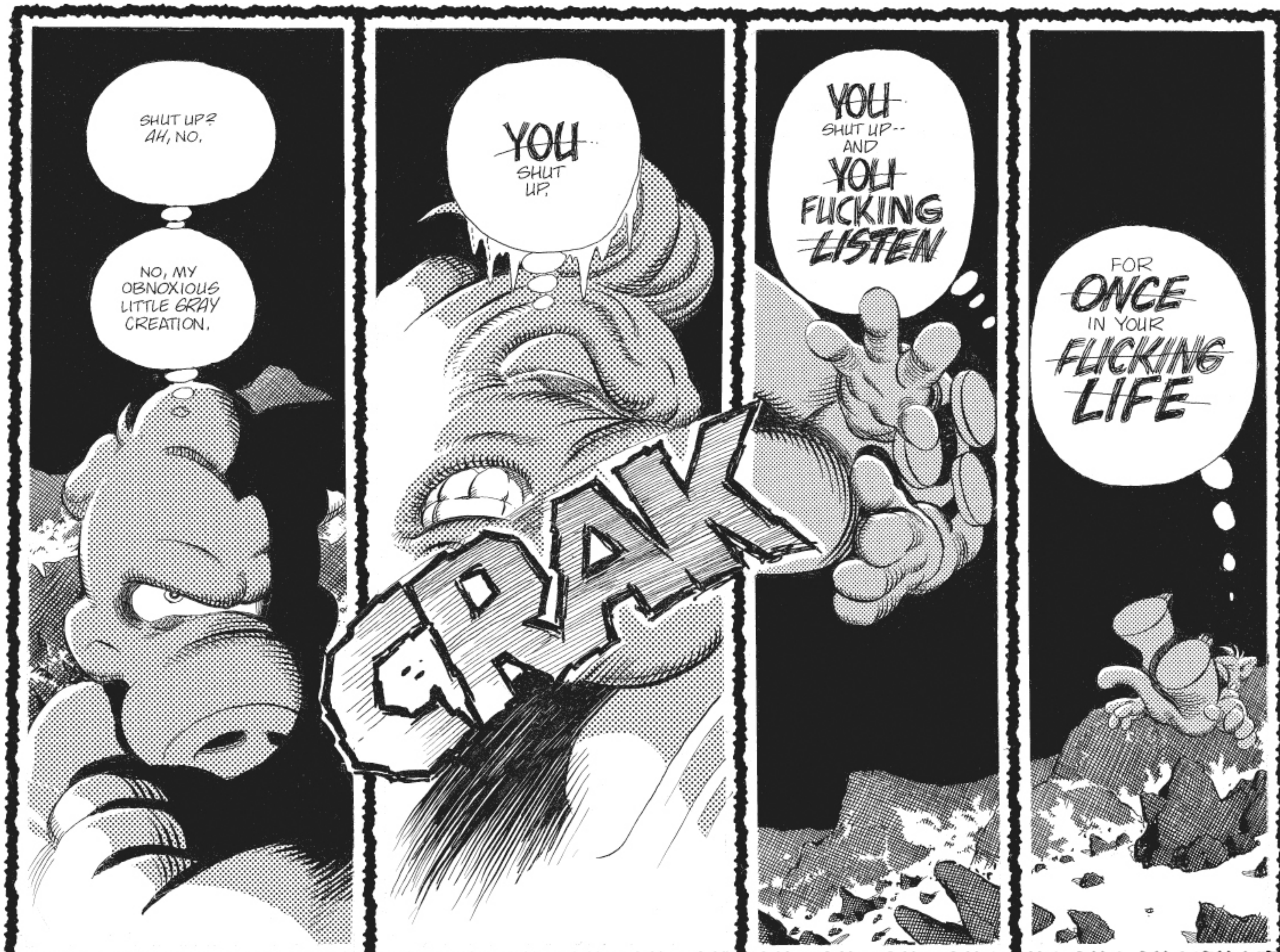
YOU WANTED JAKA
TO BE YOUR CHARON--
TO DERIVE HER PLEASURE
AND HER HAPPINESS
FROM SHARING YOUR
DESOLATION.

I CHANGED HER FOR
YOU. I ELIMINATED HER
STATUS AS A PALNAN
ARISTOCRAT BECAUSE YOU
WOULD FIND THAT STATUS
INTOLERABLE. I ELIMINATED
HER DANCING BECAUSE
YOU WOULD FIND HER
DANCING INTOLERABLE.
I ELIMINATED YOUR OWN
VIOLENT NATURE FOR
YOU...

AND STILL IT
WASN'T ENOUGH.
STILL IT WOULD
NEVER BE
ENOUGH.

YOUR INNER
NATURE REMAINED--
YOUR IGNORANCE,
YOUR INSENSITIVITY,
YOUR SELF-ABSORPTION,
YOUR...

SHUT
UP.



HAVEN'T BEEN
HIT **THAT** HARD
IN A **LONG** TIME,
HAVE YOU?

NAY.

WELL, WE'RE
RUNNING OUT
OF TIME -- AND
I'M RUNNING
OUT OF WAYS
TO "WAKE
YOU UP".

SEE, IT'S NOT
ENOUGH TO SAY,
"I GIVE"...

VERY FRUSTRATING FOR A
CREATOR TO **ENGINEER** A
CIRCUMSTANCE, THINKING
"AH-- THIS WILL DO THE
TRICK... NOW HE'LL
UNDERSTAND."

I GO TO ALL THAT TROUBLE
ONLY TO **REALISE** THAT YOU
HAVEN'T LEARNED A **THING**.
YOU "GIVE" BECAUSE YOU'VE
DECIDED **I'M** AGAINST YOU,
TARIM IS AGAINST YOU --
THE **WORLD** IS AGAINST
YOU.

I **SCARED** YOU, JUST NOW, BY
HITTING YOU VERY HARD -- AND
THEN I **SCARED** YOU SOME
MORE BY **YELLING** AT YOU.
THE PROBLEM WITH **FEAR**
GENERATED BY HITTING
AND **YELLING** IS THAT IT
... WEARS OFF.



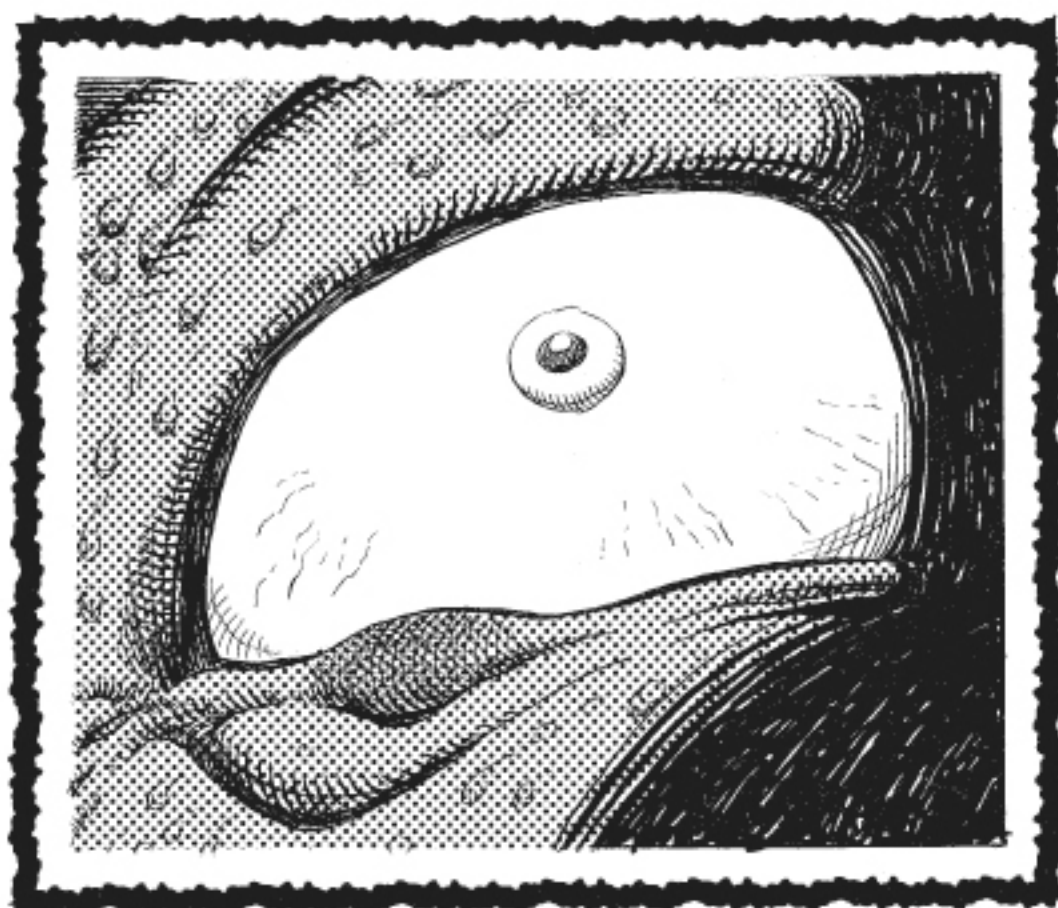
OF COURSE (TEMPORARILY
ANYWAY) YOU ARE IN A STATE OF
HEIGHTENED AWARENESS... THIS
SUDDEN SWITCH, ON MY PART, FROM
YELLING TO A DISPASSIONATE AND
REASONED TONE -- FAR FROM
REASSURING YOU -- IS FEEDING
YOUR ANXIETY, AS WELL IT
SHOULD.

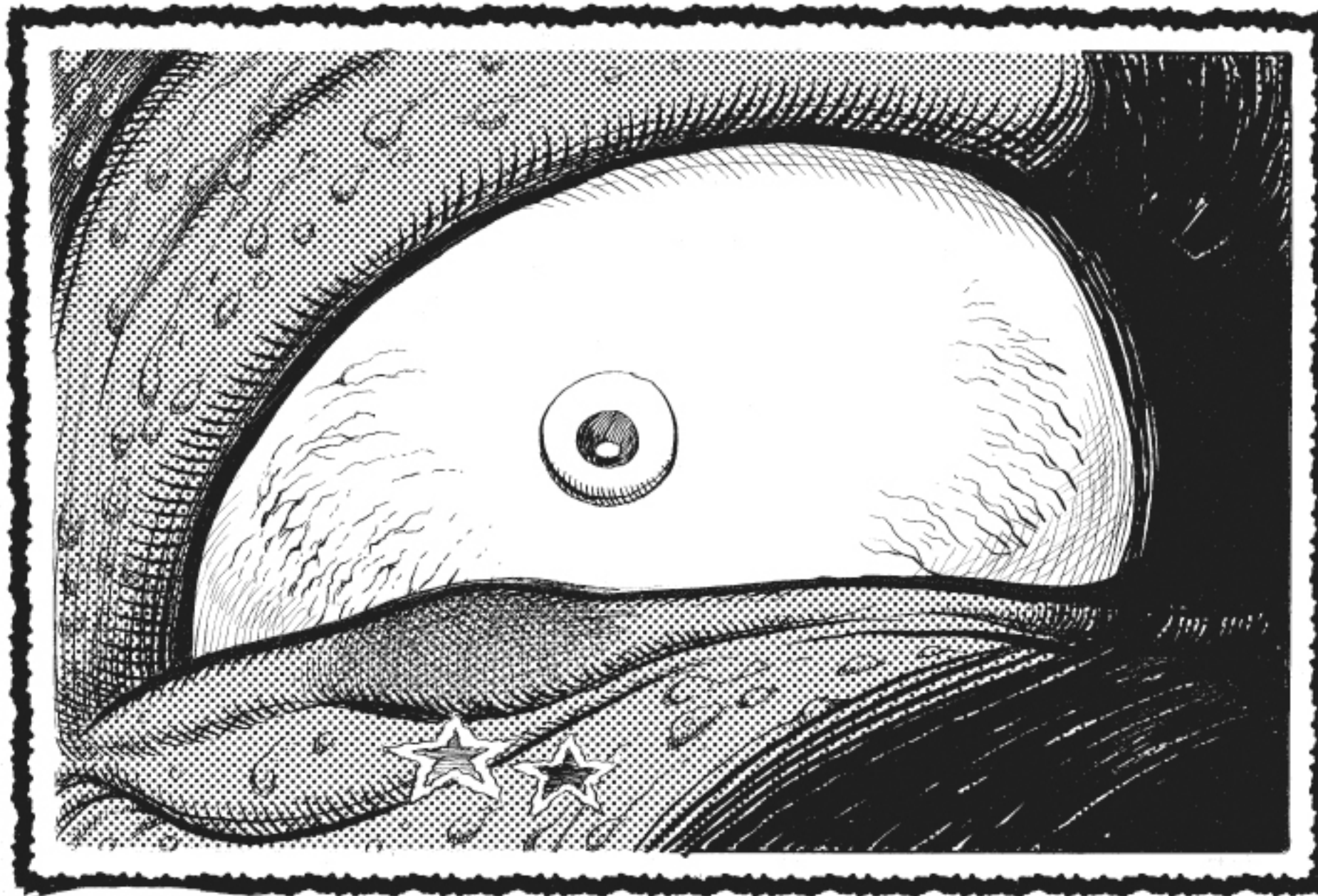
SO "AWARE" ARE YOU, THAT
A KIND OF TELEPATHY EXISTS
BETWEEN US. "CEREBUS IS
REALLY IN FOR IT NOW..."
INDEED YOU ARE.

"CEREBUS
CAN'T GET OUT
OF THIS ONE,"
INDEED, YOU
CAN'T.

"HE KNOWS CEREBUS
IS SQUEAMISH ABOUT
EYES," INDEED, I DO.

"CEREBUS CAN'T
CLOSE HIS RIGHT
EYE," INDEED, YOU
CAN'T.





AND NOW YOUR STATE
OF AWARENESS IS HEIGHTENED
EVEN FURTHER, ISN'T IT?

WE HAVE REACHED A POINT
OF THREE-WAY CONVERGENCE.
THERE IS A BUMP ON THE UNDERLID
OF YOUR RIGHT EYE -- RED AND
SWOLLEN AND PAINFUL.

CONSIDER THE ENTIRETY OF
YOUR PHYSICAL FORM TO BE
YOUR CREATOR -- ME. CONSIDER
THE BUMP TO BE YOU...

YOU ARE A PAINFUL
RED SWELLING VERY NEAR
TO YOUR CREATOR'S MOST
HIGHLY-DEVELOPED ORGAN
OF PERCEPTION...

THE PRESSURE IS
BUILDING FROM WITHIN,
GROWING BY THE MOMENT.
SOMETHING NEEDS TO
BE DONE.

AND THAT BRINGS US
TO THE THIRD PART OF
THE CONVERGENCE:
"YOU" ... "ME"

AND A REMARKABLE --
LARGELY FORGOTTEN AND
LARGELY UNFORGETTABLE --
QUIRK IN THE HISTORY OF THE
MEDIUM WITHIN WHICH YOU
EXIST.
TO WIT:

THE "INJURY-
TO-EYE" MOTIF

motif (mō·tēf')

also **motive** (mō·tīv', mō·tēv')

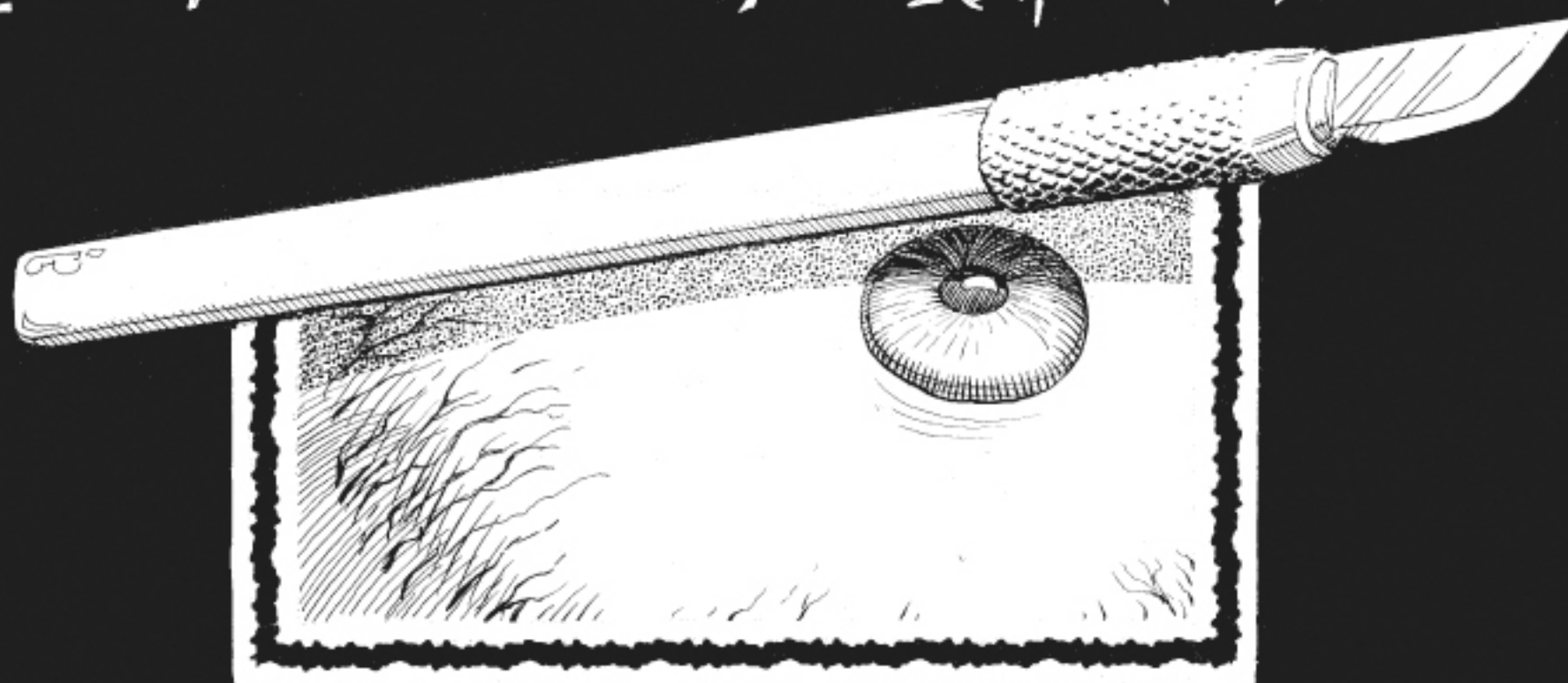
- n.* 1a) The underlying theme or main element in a literary or artistic work b) A dominant theme 2. A significant phrase in a musical composition 3. A repeated figure or design in architecture or decoration

To describe "injury to eye" as a "motif" seems oxymoronic. "An underlying theme or main element..."? It occurred infrequently in "crime" and "horror" comics of the fifties: a panel or two functioning as an archetype of extreme brutality, establishing its perpetrator as an individual devoid of the basics of human empathy. The actual "theme" of such stories would be described more accurately as "crime does not pay" or "bad people come to a bad end". The supplementary definition — "a dominant theme" — MIGHT apply if one contemplates the **EFFECT** of such depictions on the reader/viewer. The shocked, new awareness created by the anticipation of "injury to eye" imbues the panel or panel sequence with a "dominance" which exceeds (dramatically) the space it occupies in the story's context. "A significant phrase in a musical composition": on the surface this seems completely at odds with a soundless medium of expression. But, again, in contemplating the **EFFECT** upon the reader, the internalized, nearly musical coupling of words and pictures, suddenly conjoined (at an individual level of perception) by a piercing, keening "gore shriek" (if you will) gives this definition a greater applicability than might be most commonly supposed. How extensive will the injury be? How detailed will the illustration be and at what proximity will it be viewed? The individual reader/viewer's imagination, squeamishness and reluctant anticipation define the boundaries of the "phrase" and its "significance". We will leave discussion of the third definition for the aftermath of this PARTICULAR "injury to eye"...



scalpel

(skal'pel) *n.* A small pointed knife with a very sharp thin blade used in dissection and in surgery
 [L scalpellum dim. of scalprum Knife < scalpere to CUT]



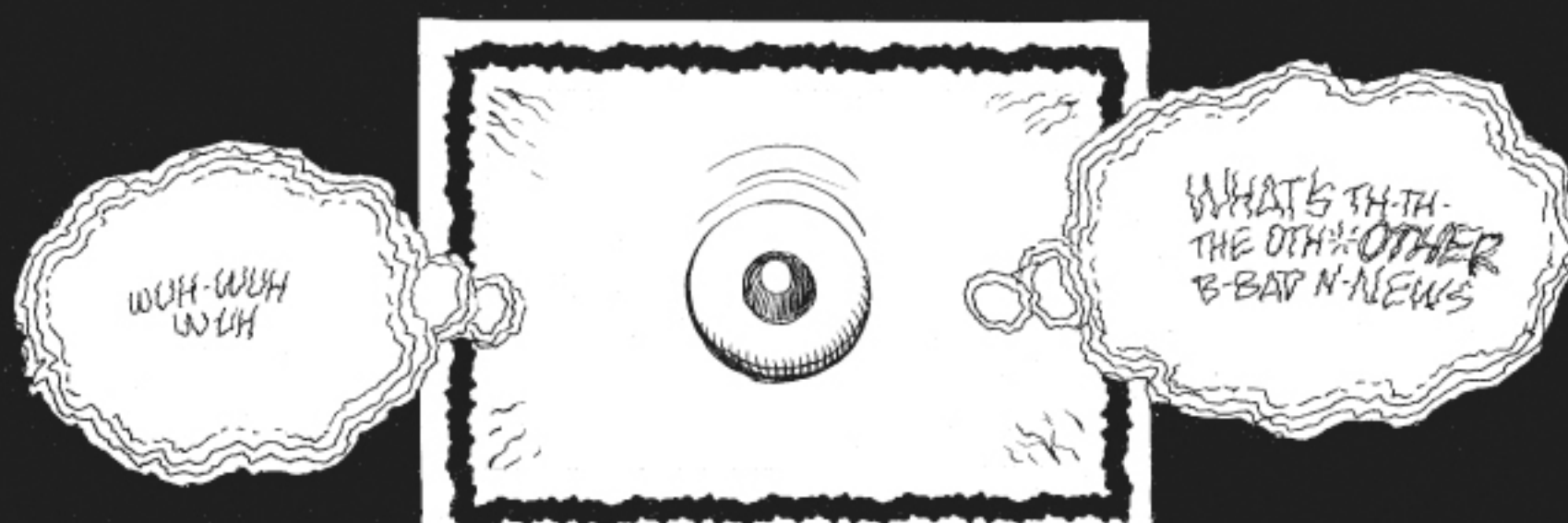
And now your awareness is heightened even further. Actually, the scalpel comes later in the proceedings. If it's any consolation to you, I went through this myself — twice. The first time, the bump was on my upper lid and (being, like yourself, a slow learner) I didn't get the point (pardon the pun). The second time, there was a bump on my upper AND lower lid. With the LOWER lid, I got the point.

The point: It is difficult for a creator to engineer a suitable repercussion for the pain which his unfeeling creation has inflicted upon those who feel very deeply and emotionally (please note the accuracy of the term "repercussion"; the dynamic at work is one of "cause and effect", not "punishment").

"Let me show you what you have done unto others," the creator implies. "Let me show you all at once."

So! I have bad news and good news and bad news for you. The FIRST bit of bad news is that the scalpel will — very slowly — cut vertically and horizontally through the bump so the blood and pus can be drained from it, the wound irrigated and cleansed.

The GOOD news is that you won't feel a thing when it happens. The entire area will be numb — completely insensitive to any pain or sensation whatsoever.



Ah! You see? You're finally paying attention. Isn't heightened awareness grand?

The OTHER bad news (my obnoxious little gray creation) is the

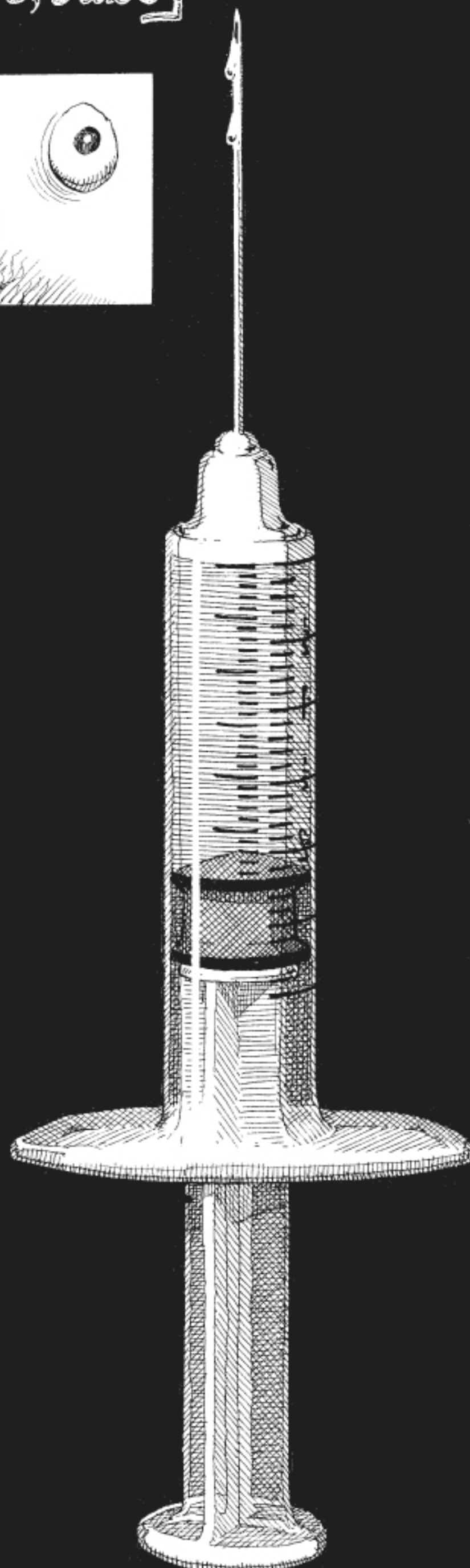
syringe
(sir'inj, si-rinj) *n.*
an instrument (as for the injection of medicine) that consists of a hollow barrel fitted with a plunger and a hollow **needle** [Gk. *syring*, *syrinx* panpipe, tube]



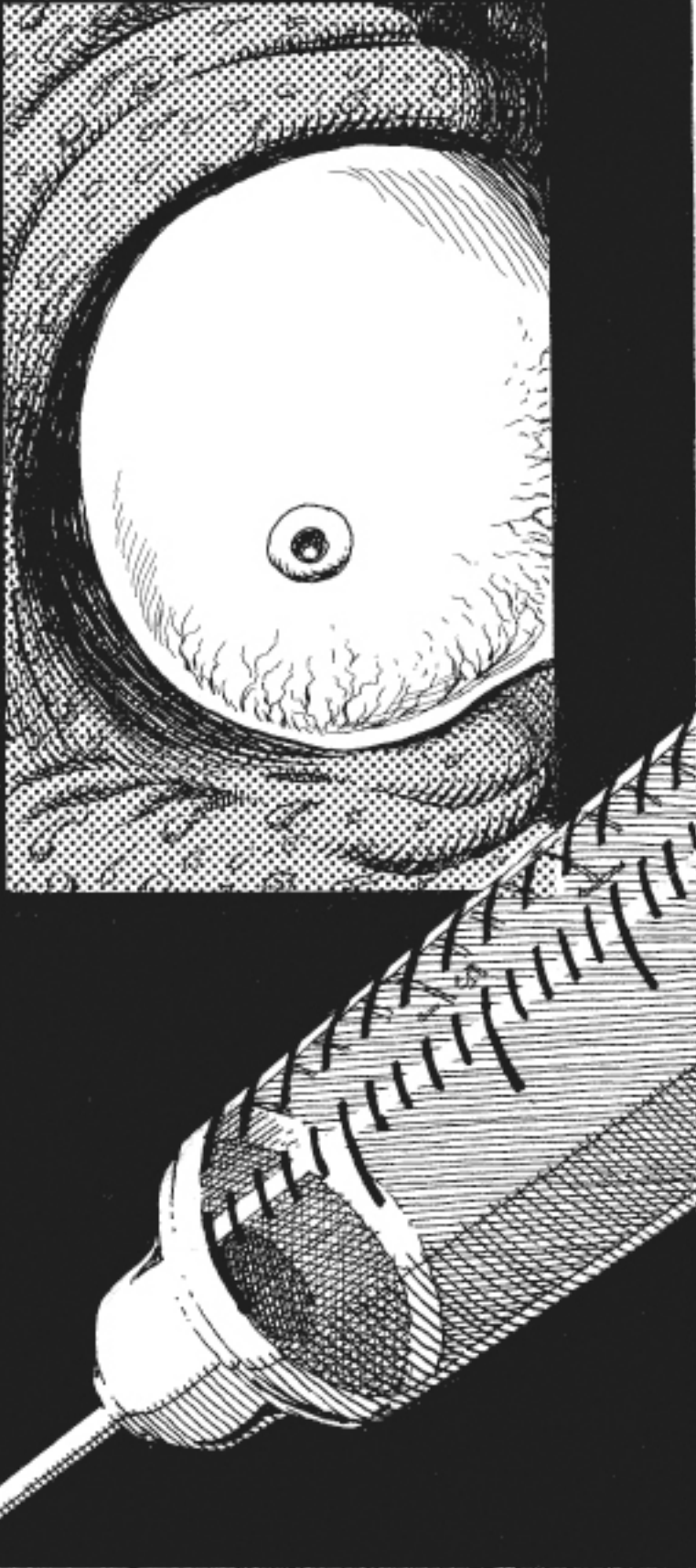
There are two other supplementary definitions I won't bore you with. The syringe contains an anaesthetic — a solution which will deaden the nerve endings in the afflicted area, completely neutralizing their ability to conduct impulses of pain perception to your brain. The only way to flood the afflicted area with anaesthetic is by means of a hypodermic injection. And the only way to inject it there (and this is OTHER bad news) is through the hollow center of the needle, which must first PIERCE the SOFT FLESH of the underlid.

The second time I went through this, — knowing what was coming — there was a song fragment going through my head before, during and after.

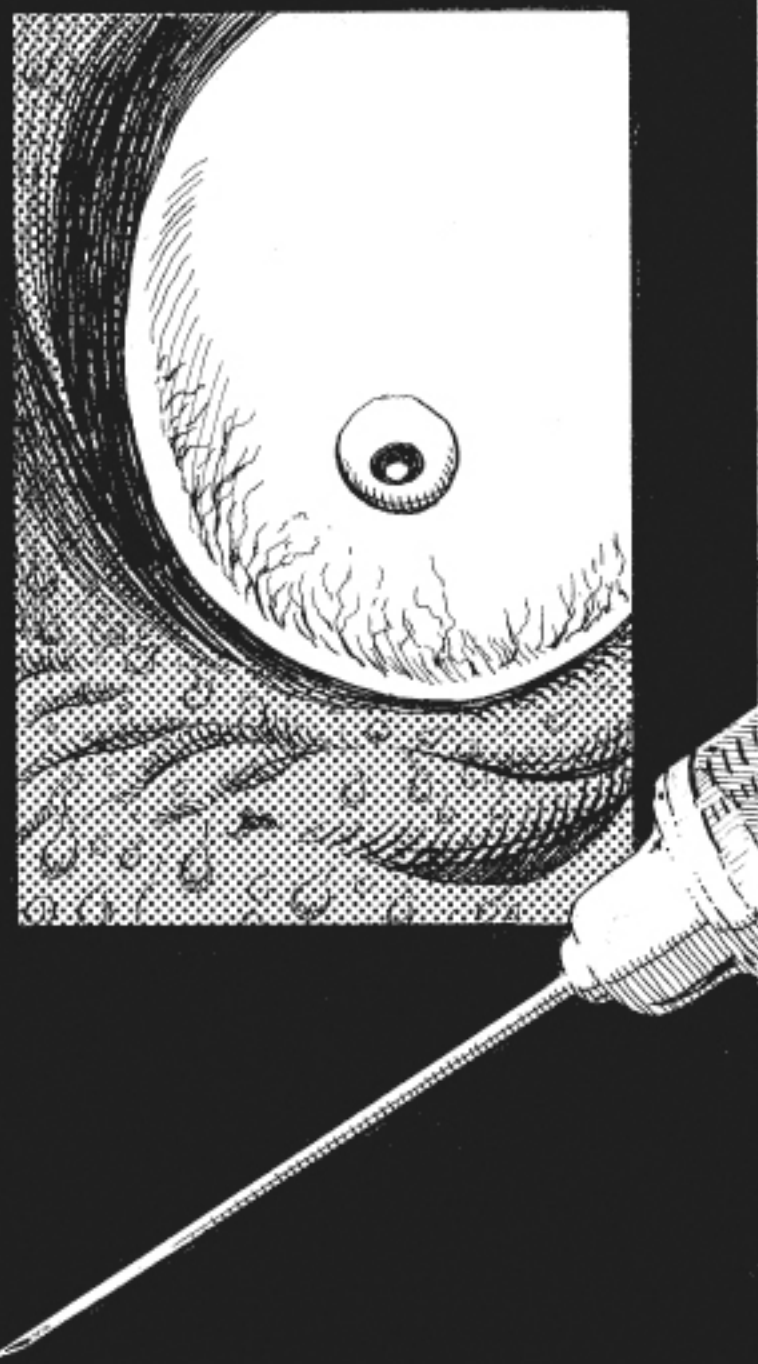
It was the part that goes...



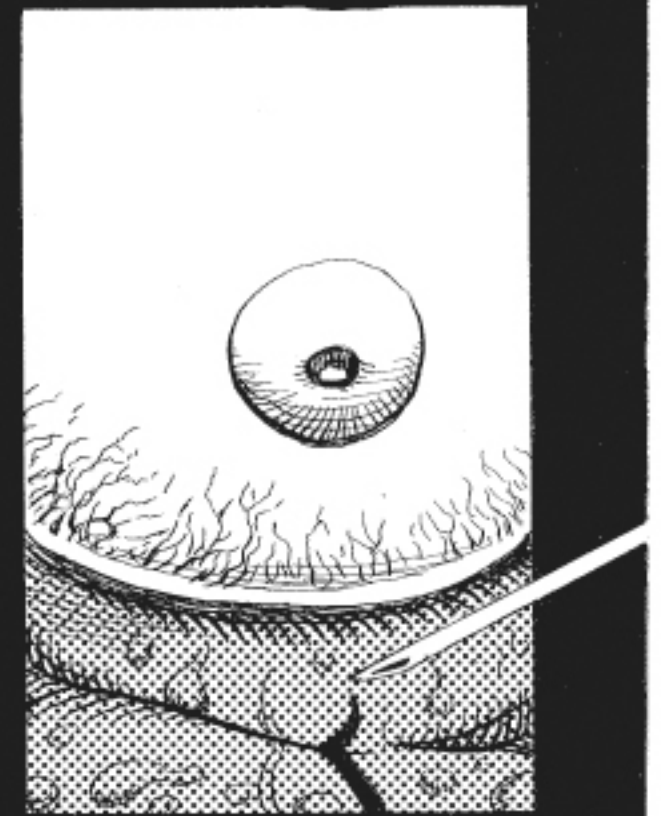
OKAY.



OKAY.



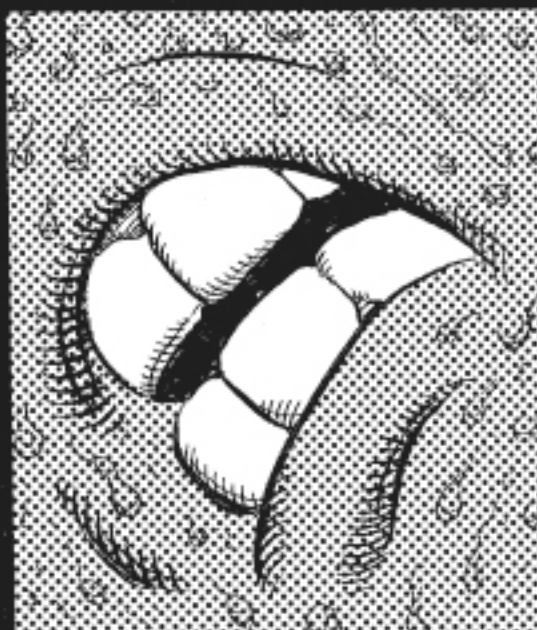
OKAY.



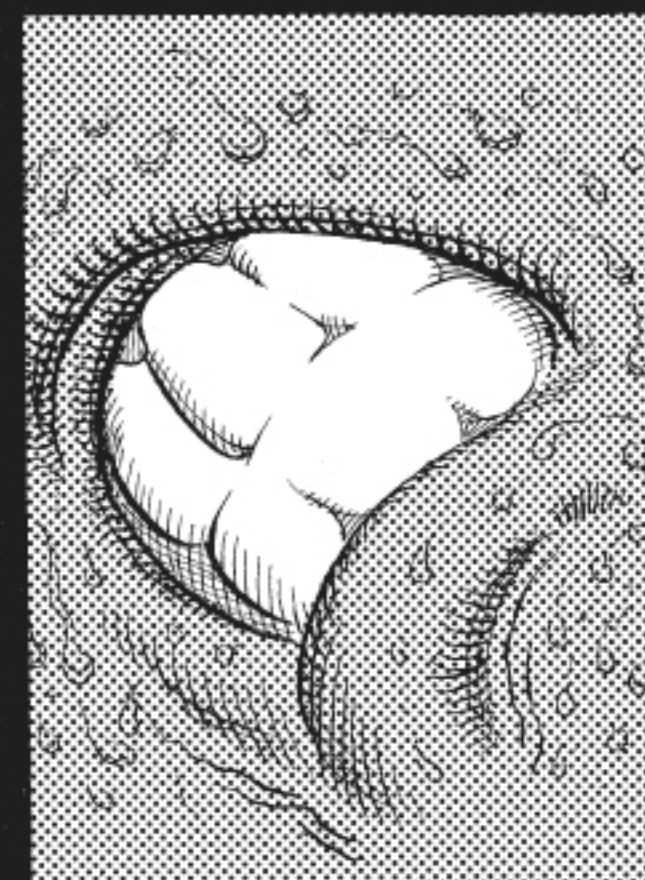
IT'S
JUST A
LITTLE

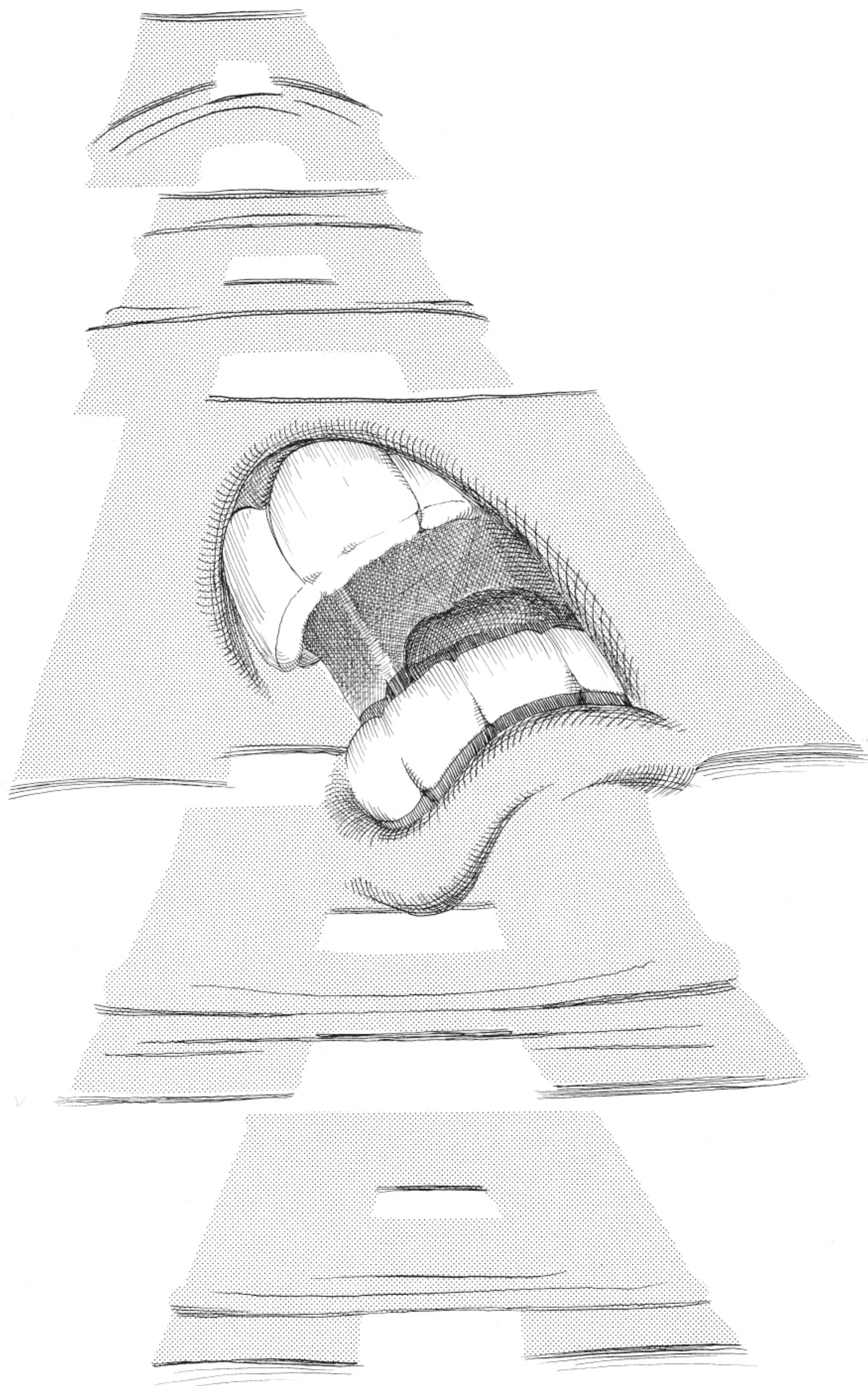


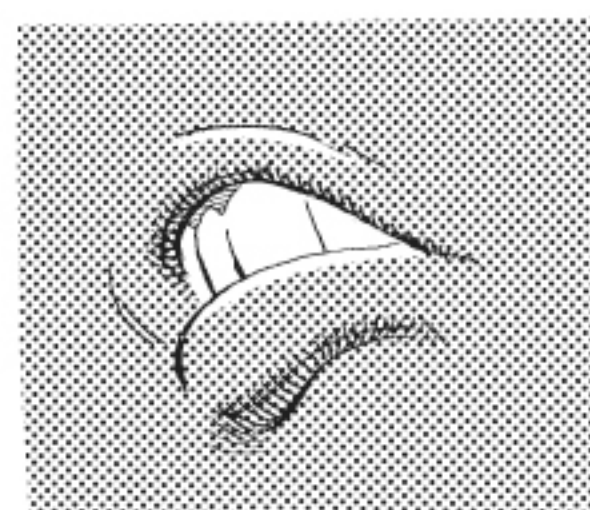
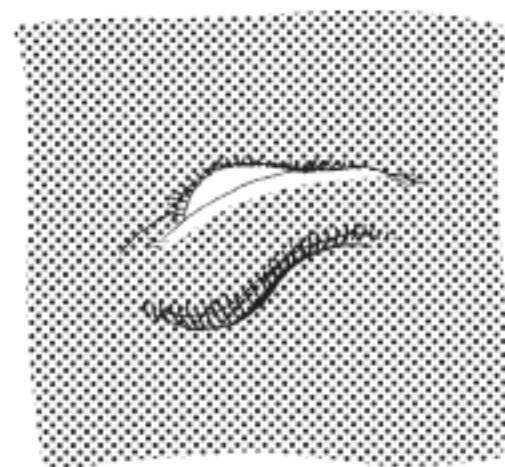
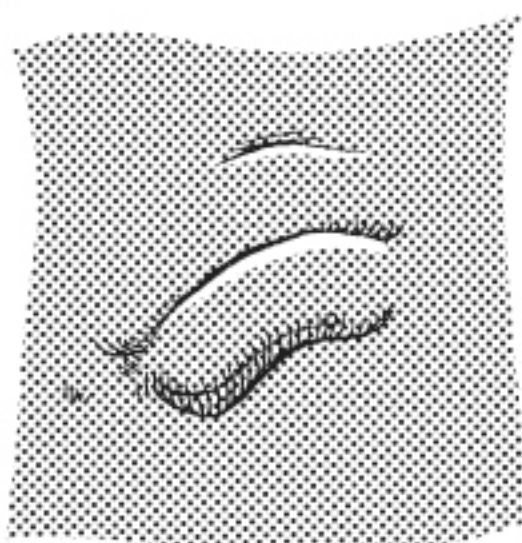
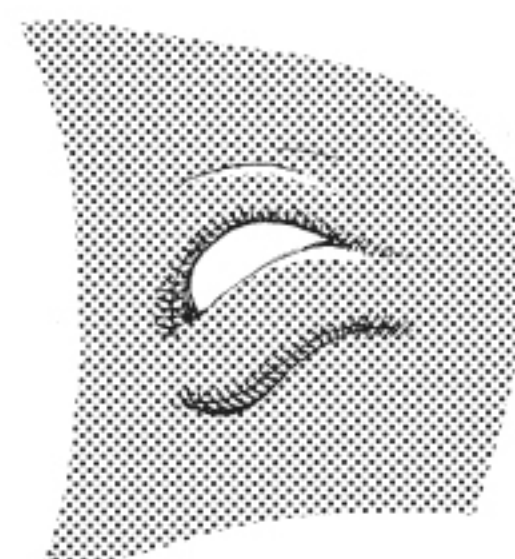
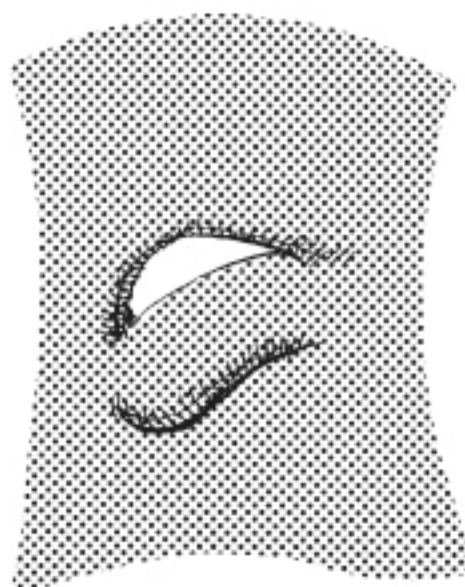
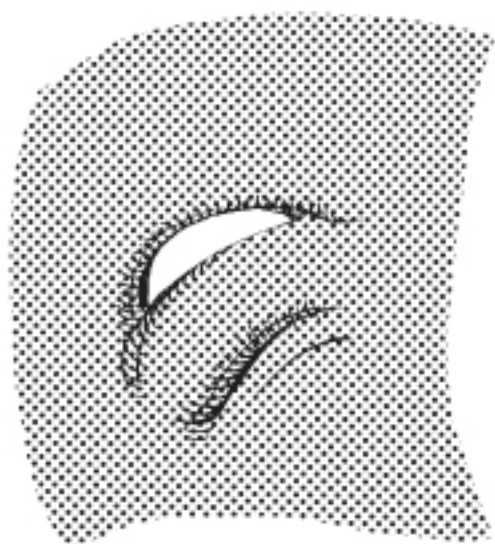
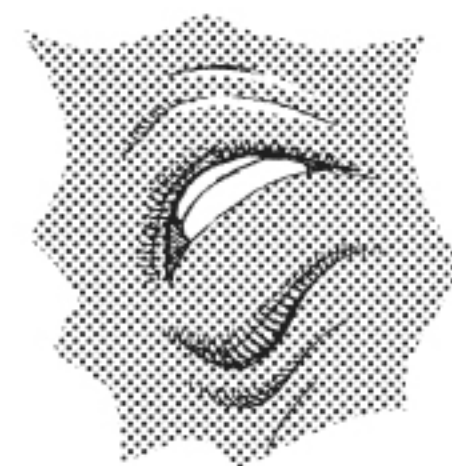
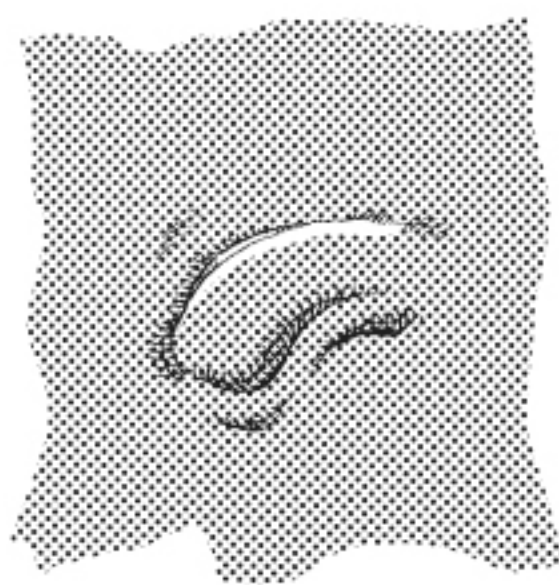
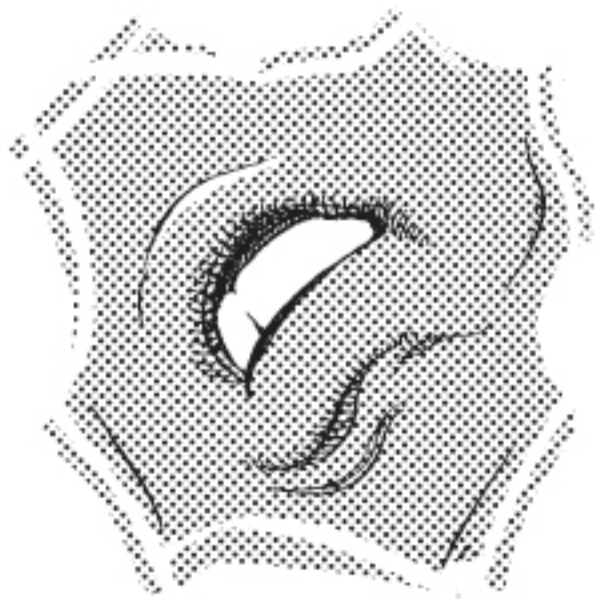
PIN-
PRICK.



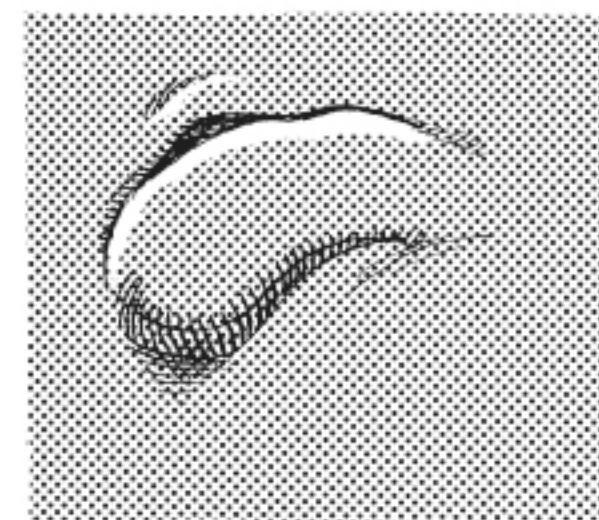
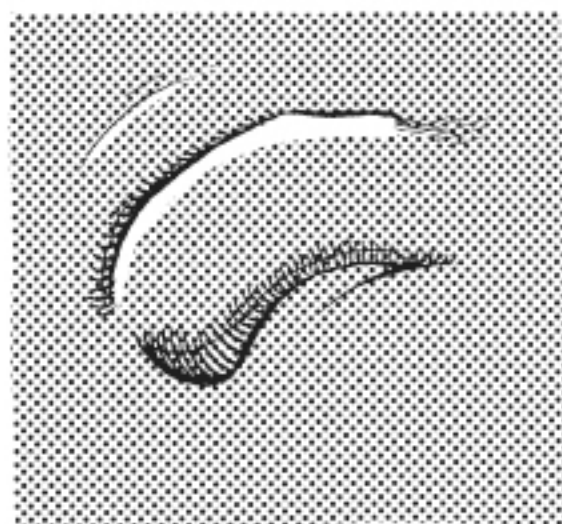
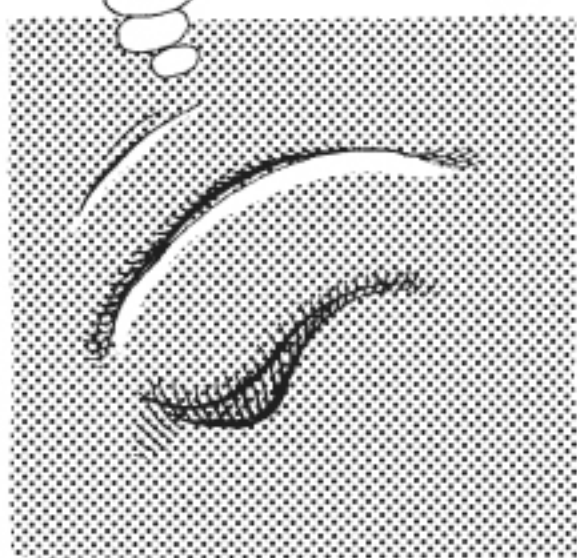
THERE'LL
BE NO
MORE:



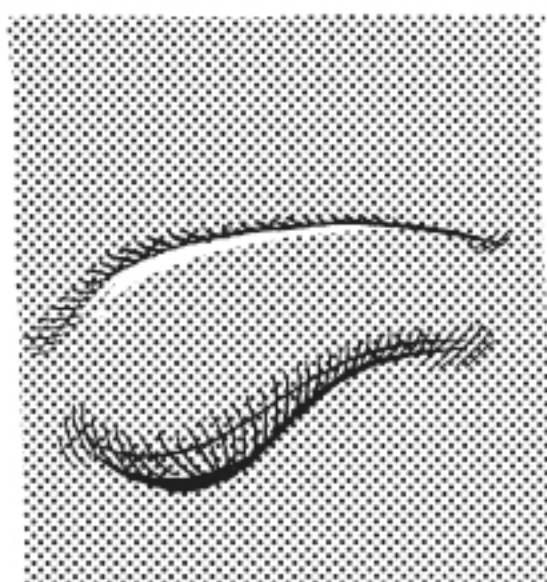
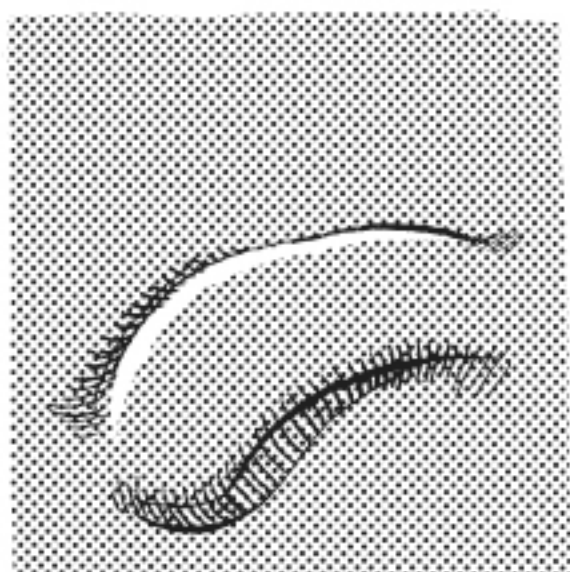
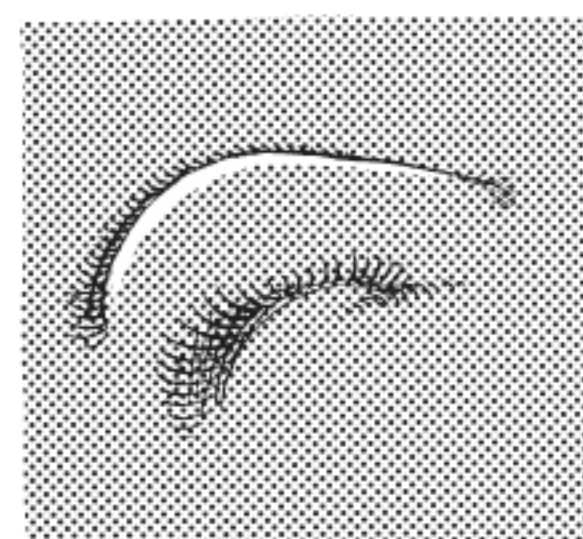
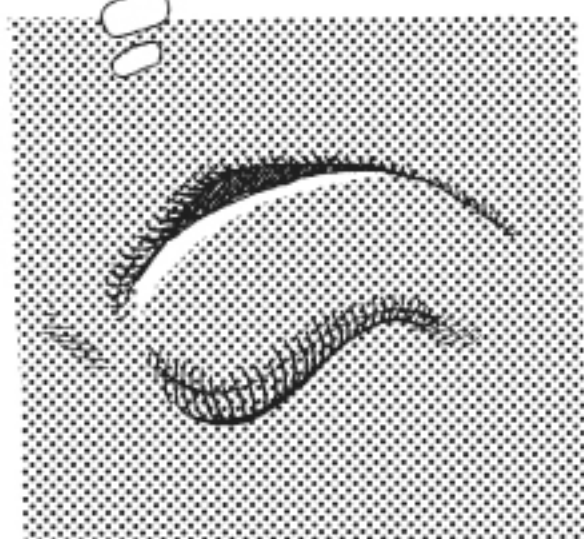
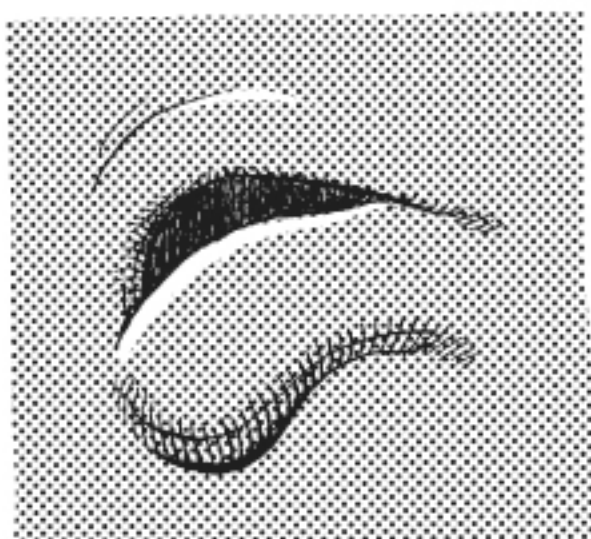




THERE'S MORE
PAIN INVOLVED
IN GETTING
YOUR HAIR
CUT.

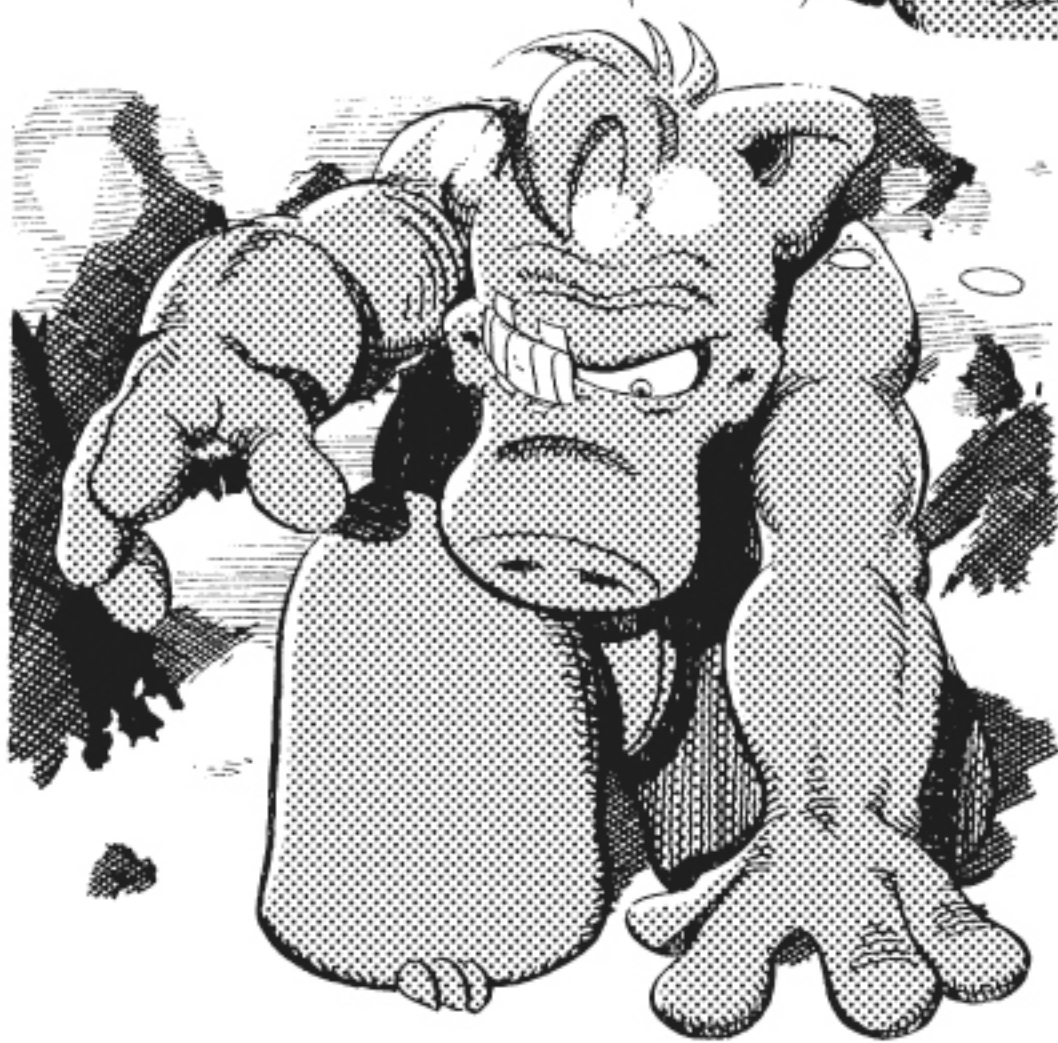


AYE.



OKAY, I'M
ALL DONE.

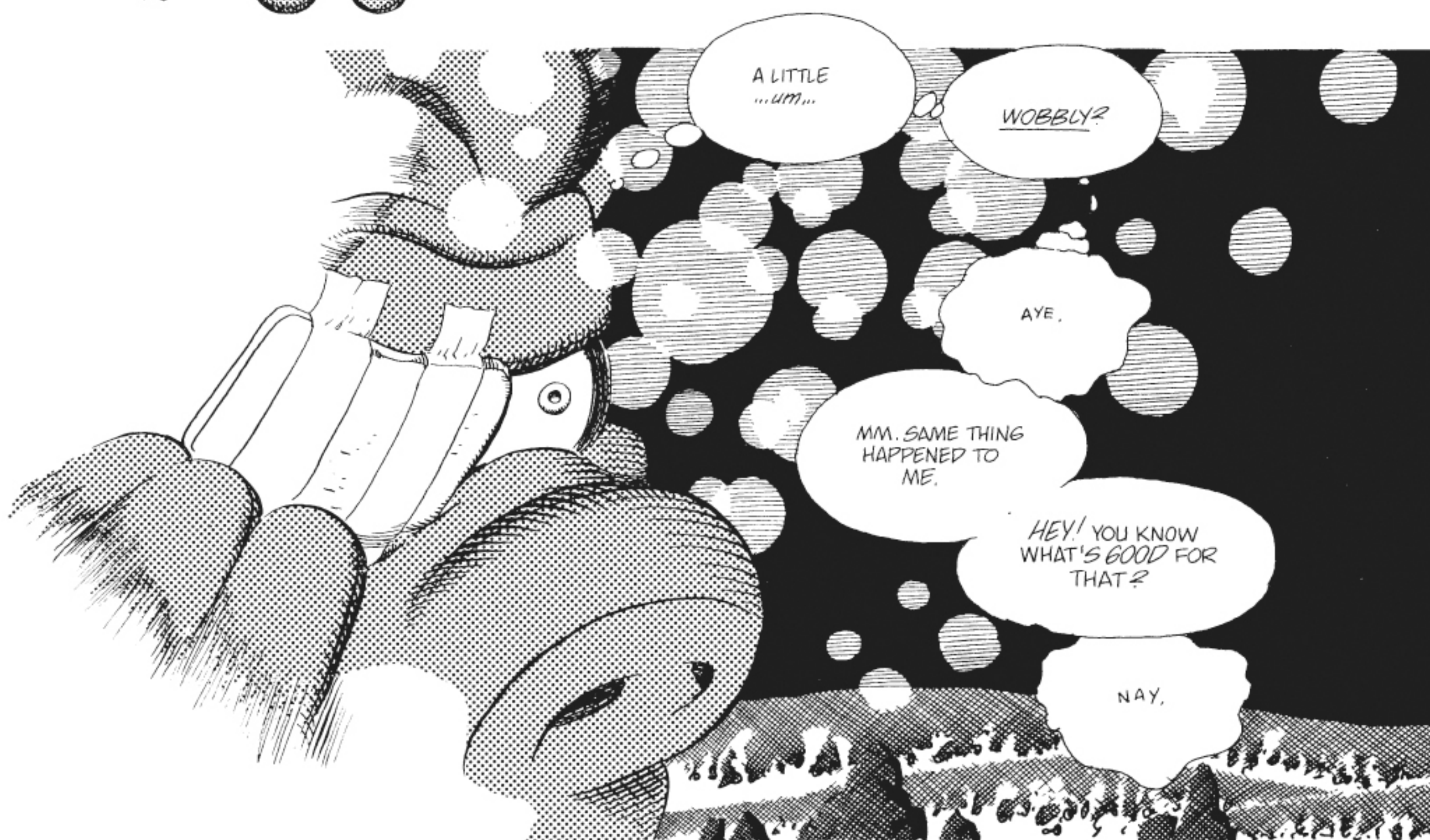




WHOOPS!

WHOOOP.

CAREFUL.



A LITTLE
...UM...

WOBBLY?

AYE.

MM. SAME THING
HAPPENED TO
ME.

HEY! YOU KNOW
WHAT'S GOOD FOR
THAT?

NAY.



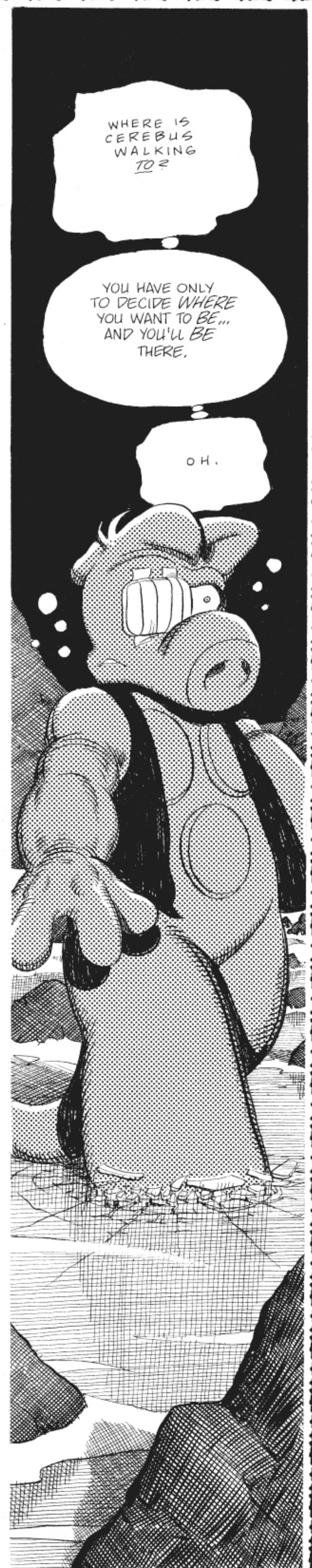
A NICE,
LONG
WALK.

WHAT?

SURE, YOUR
EYE DOESN'T
HURT AND
THERE'S NOTHING
WRONG
WITH YOUR
LEGS...

AYE,
BUT...

BUT



WHERE IS
CEREBUS
WALKING
TO?

YOU HAVE ONLY
TO DECIDE *WHERE*
YOU WANT TO *BE*...
AND YOU'LL *BE*
THERE,

OH.

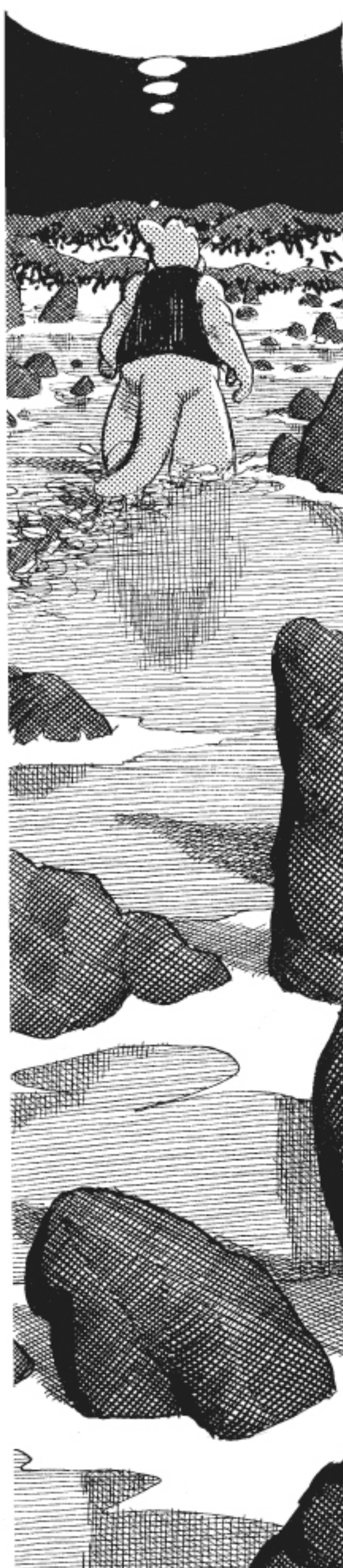


"A REPEATED FIGURE
IN ARCHITECTURE OR
DESIGN"

WITH A PIN-PRICK, I
SCULPTED A FIGURE IN THE
ARCHITECTURE OF YOUR MIND,
INTRODUCED A DESIGN ELEMENT
INTO WHAT REMAINS OF YOUR
EXISTENCE,

WHETHER IT IS
A REPEATED FIGURE
IS UP TO YOU,

YOU CAN REMOVE
THE PATCH IN AN HOUR
OR SO. THE MINOR
DISCOLORATION WILL
BE GONE TOMORROW



DOES CEREBUS
DIE LIKE THE
JUDGE SAID?

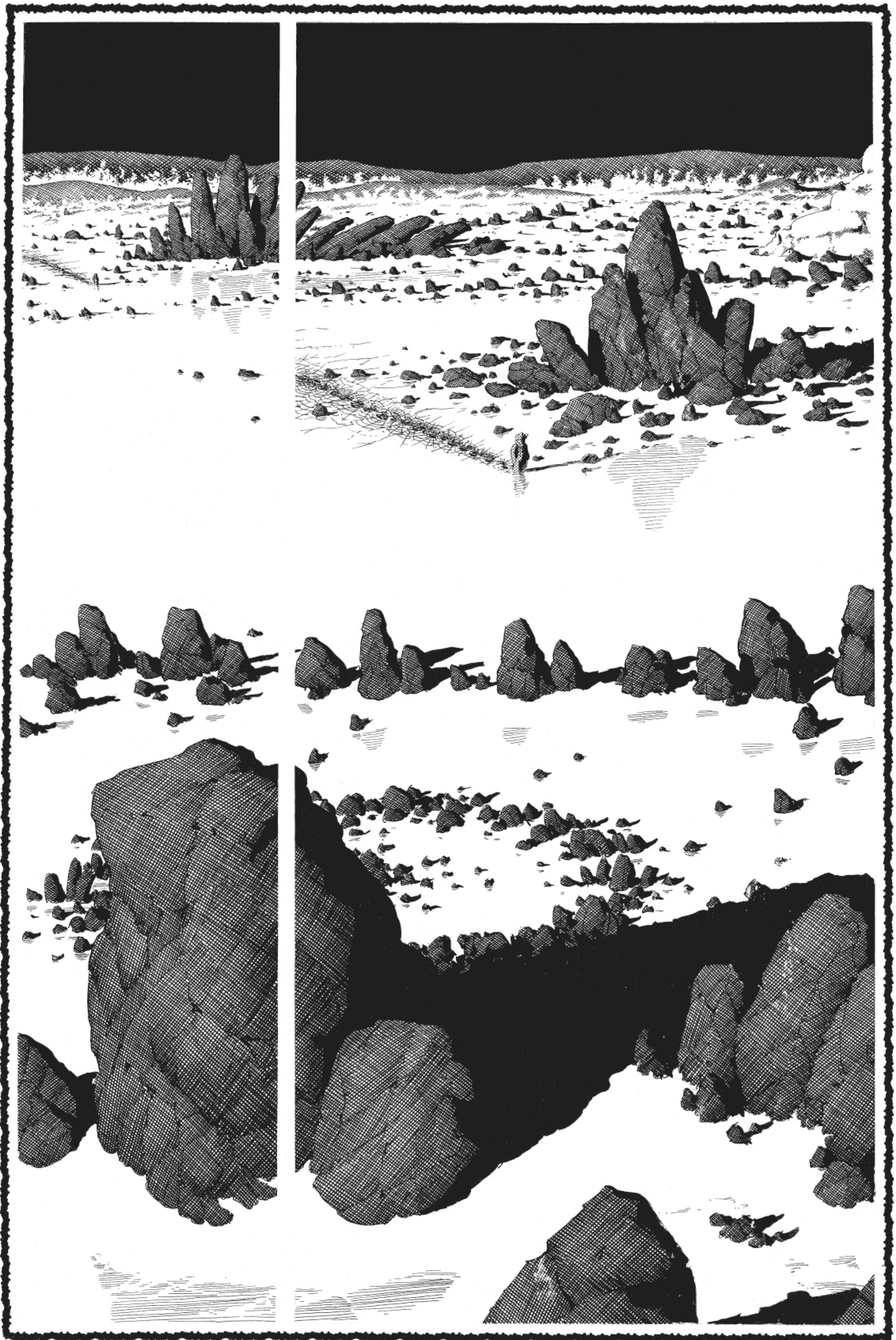
YOU MEAN
"ALONE, UNMOURNED
AND UNLOVED"?

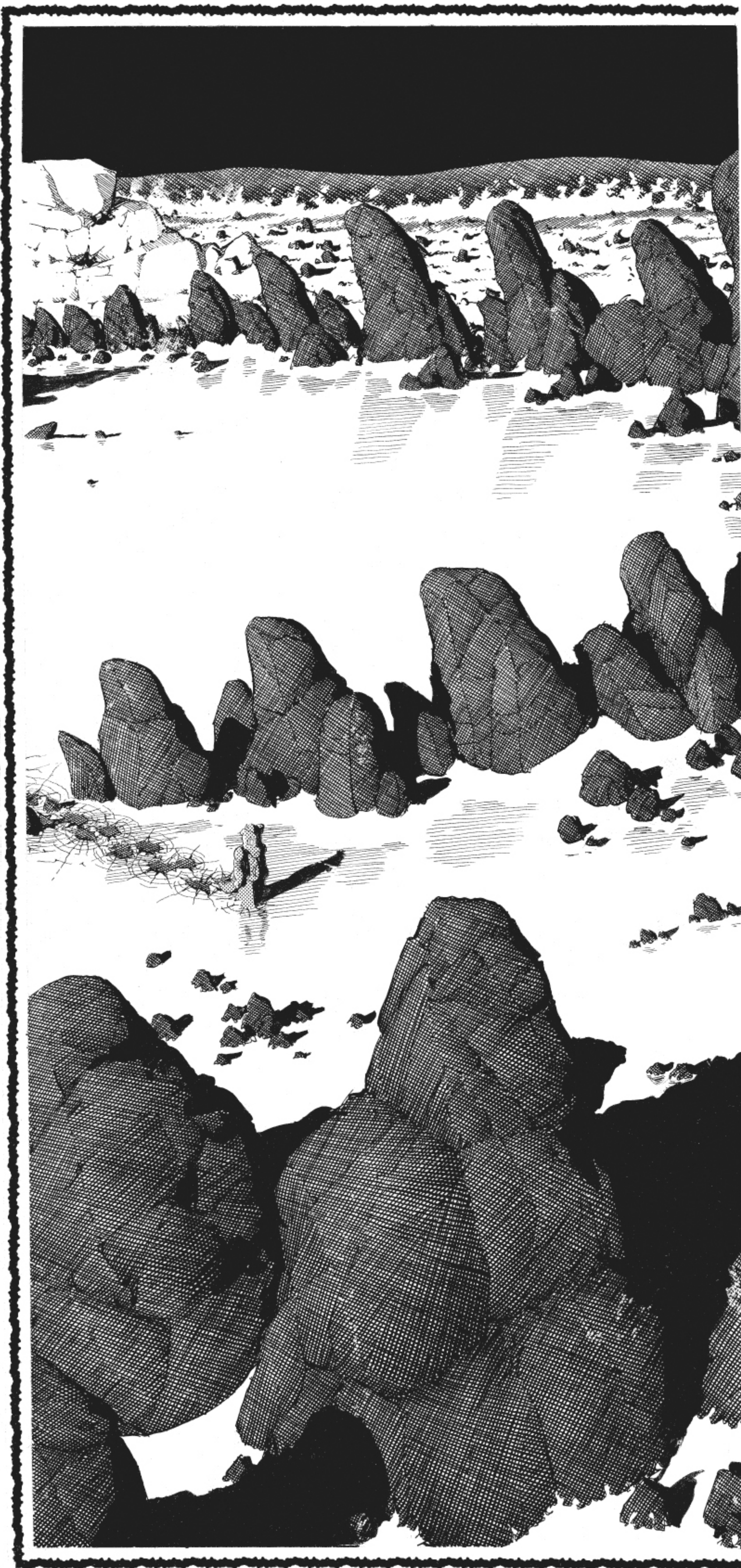
A YE

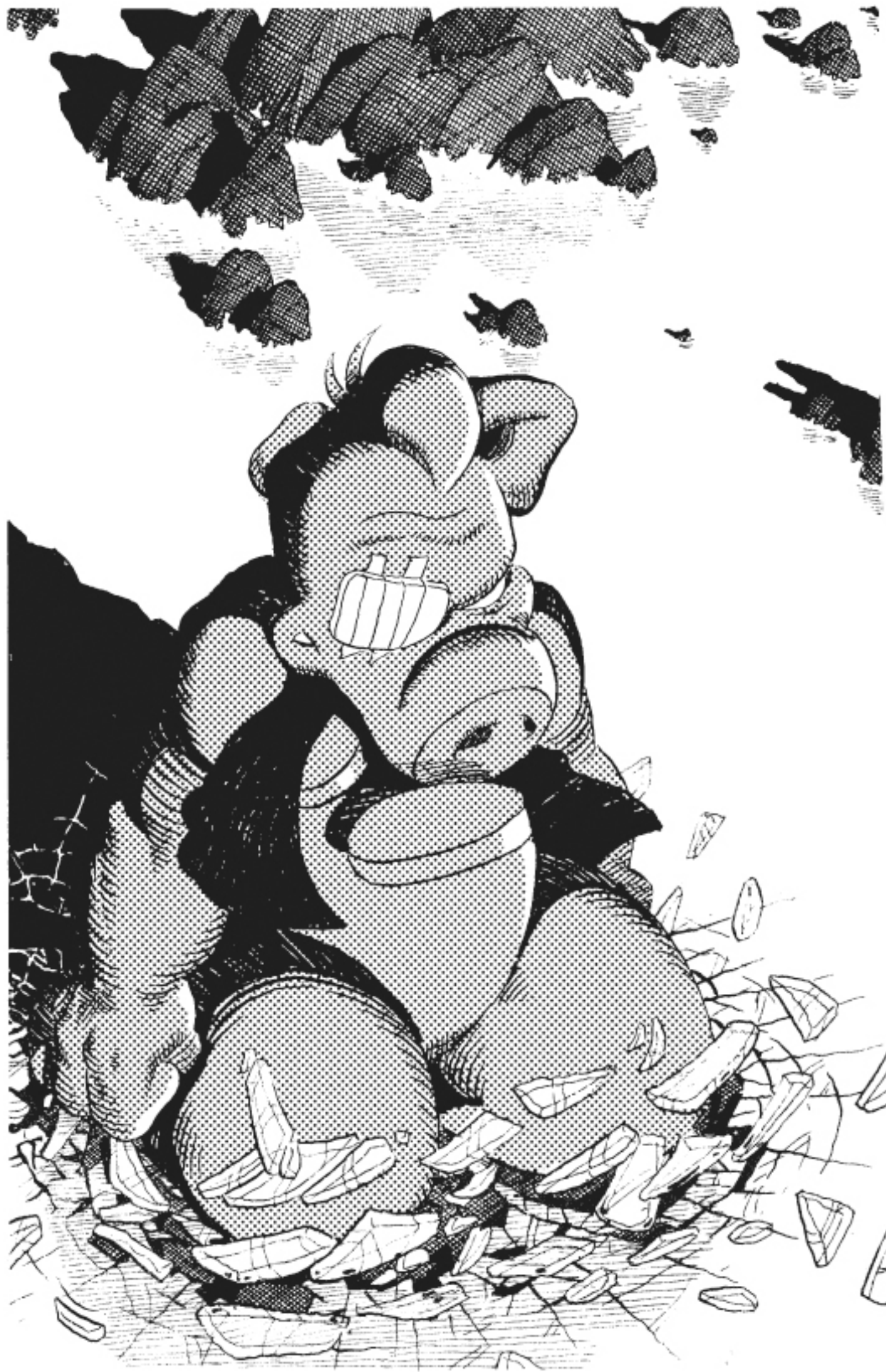
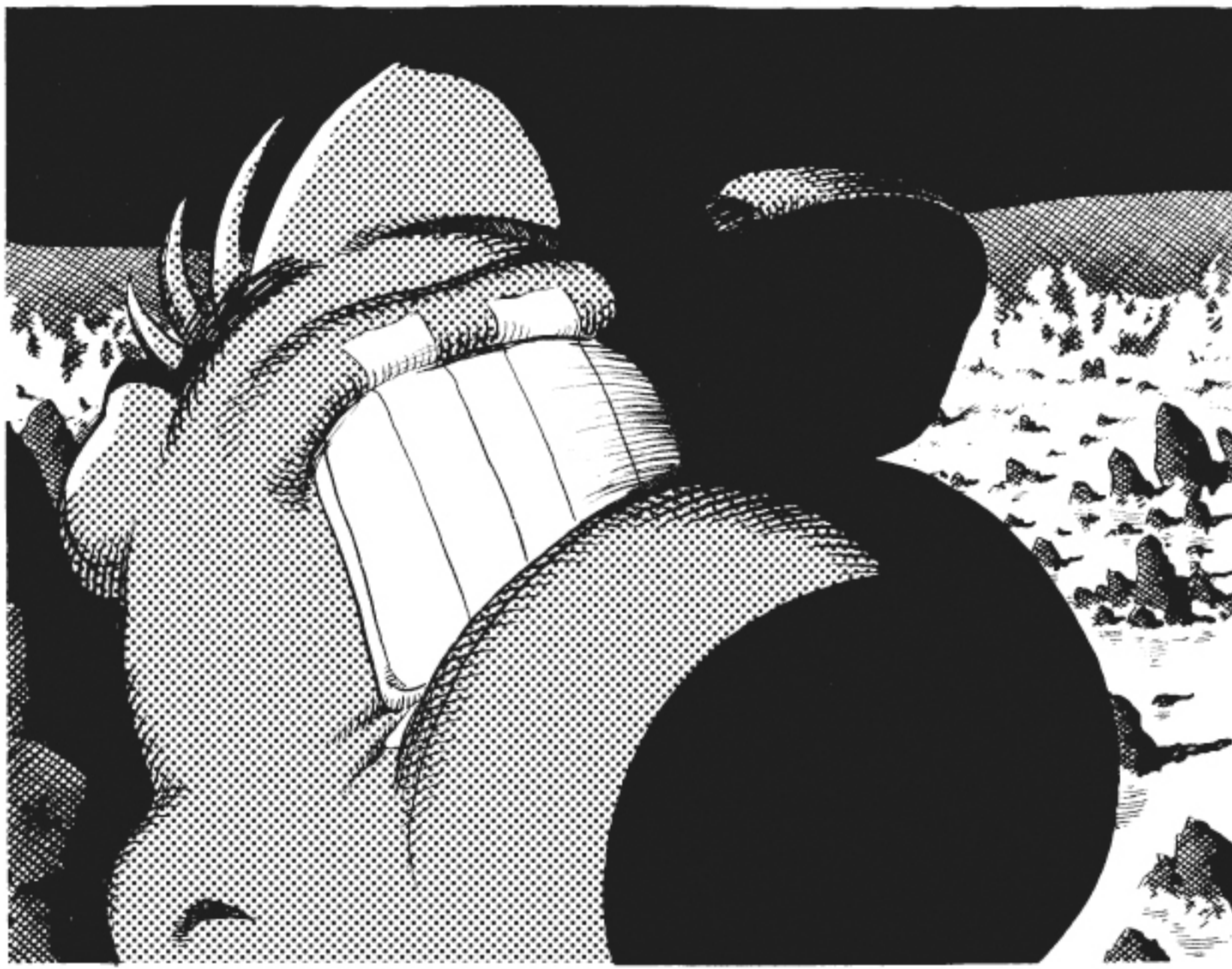
WELL, YES, AT THE
RATE YOU'RE GOING
WHAT OTHER ENDING
IS POSSIBLE?

WHAT OTHER
ENDING TO YOUR
STORY MAKES SENSE
TO YOU?

THINK
ABOUT
IT.









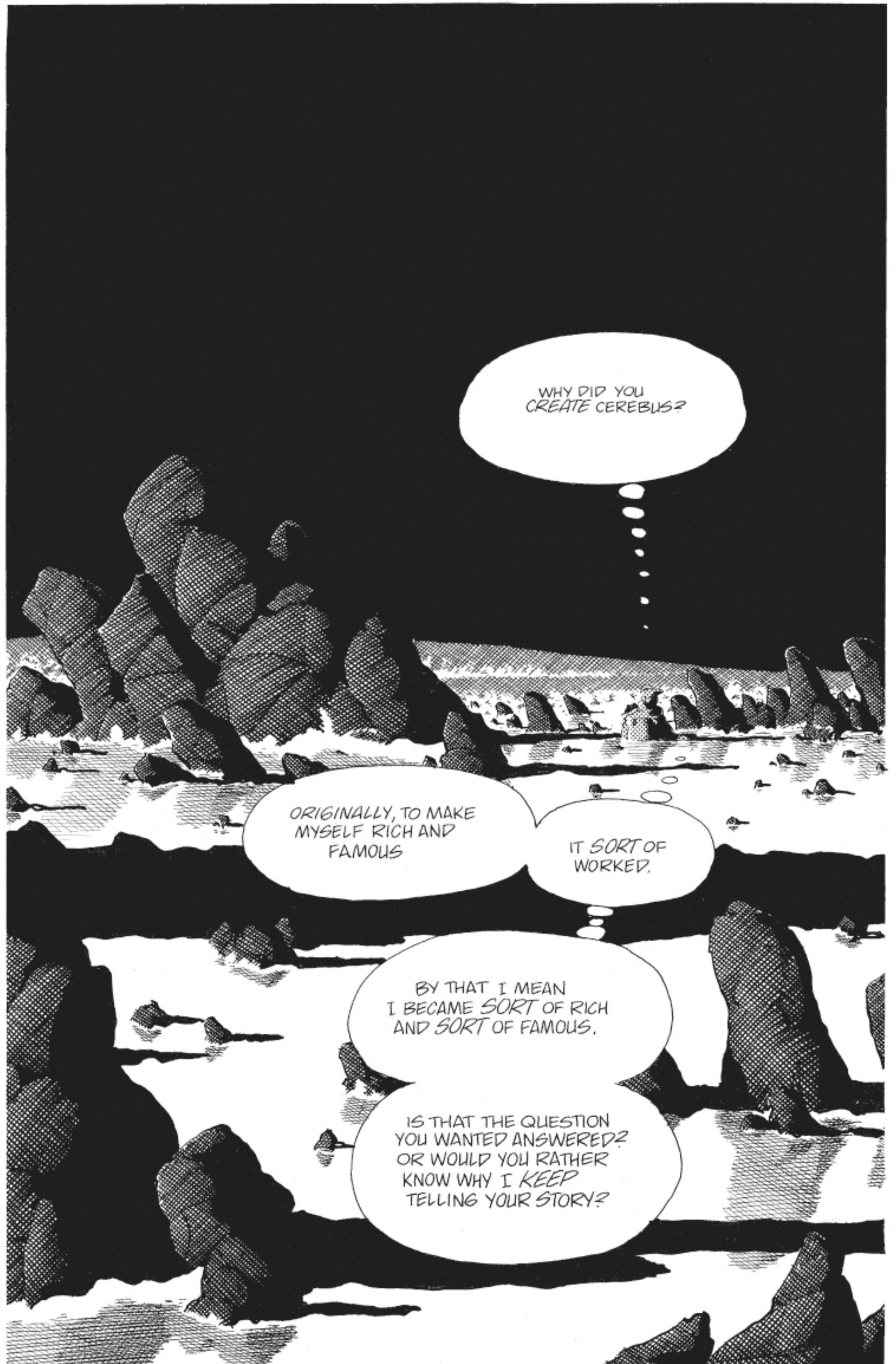
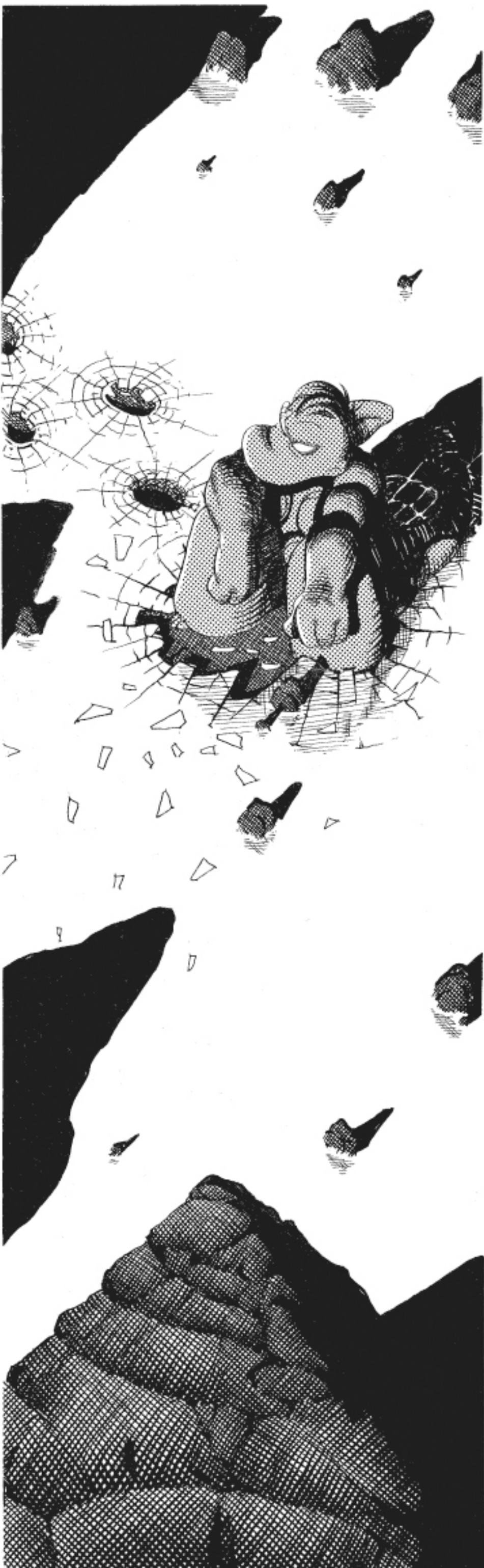
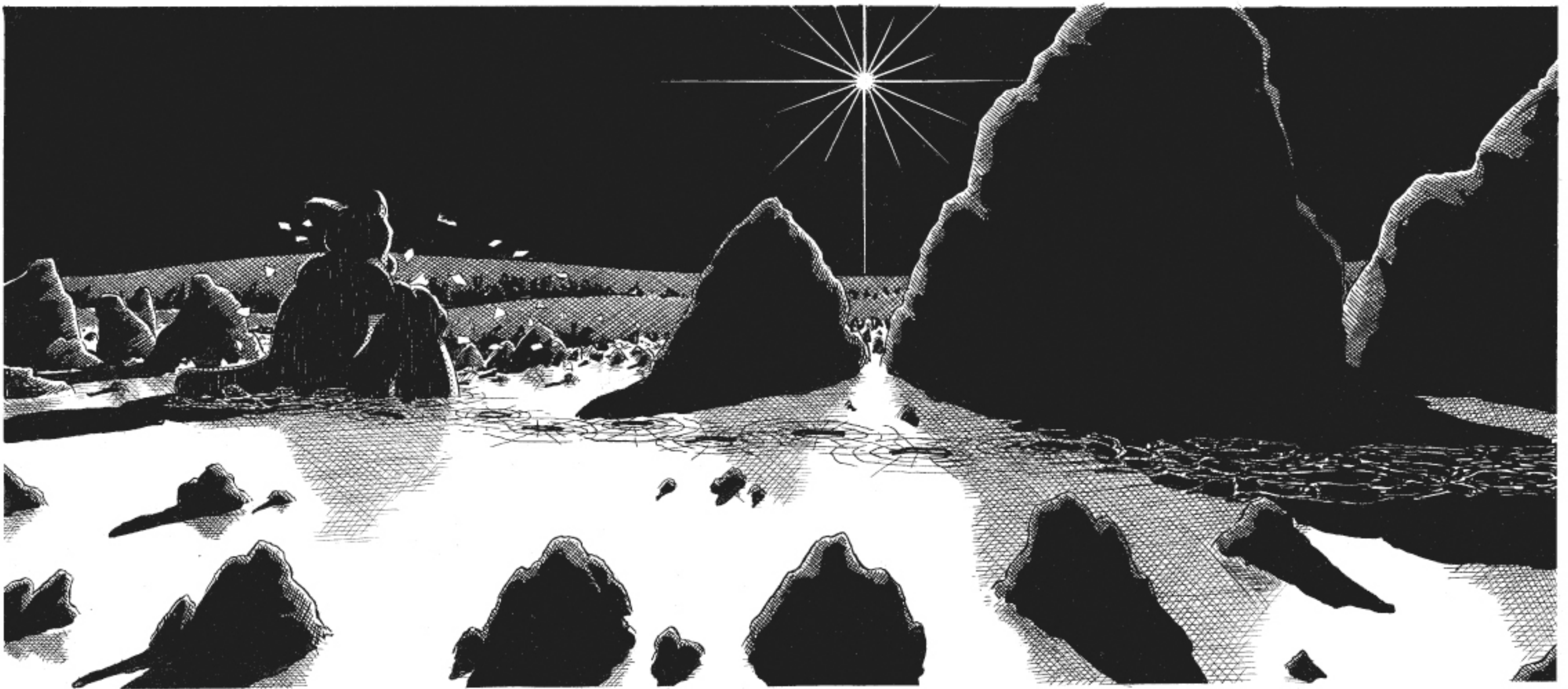
CEREBUS
IS A TERRIBLE
PERSON.

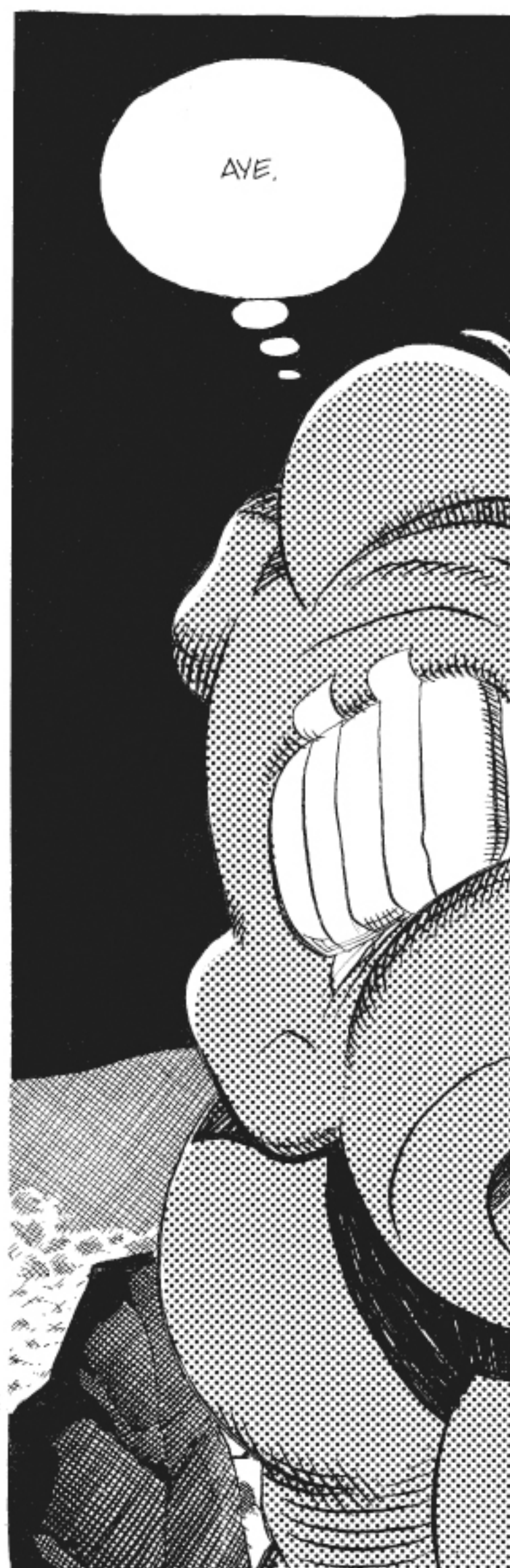
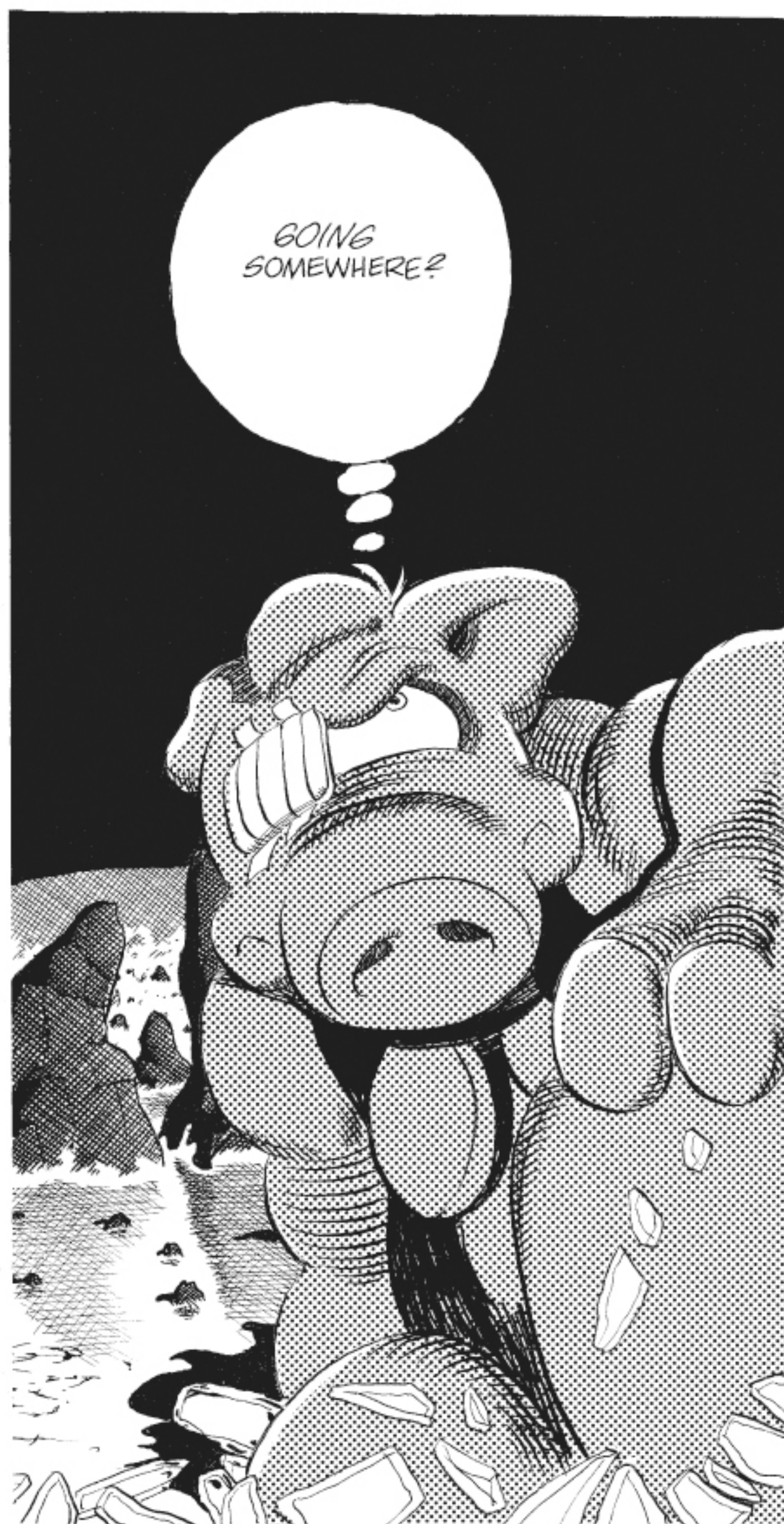
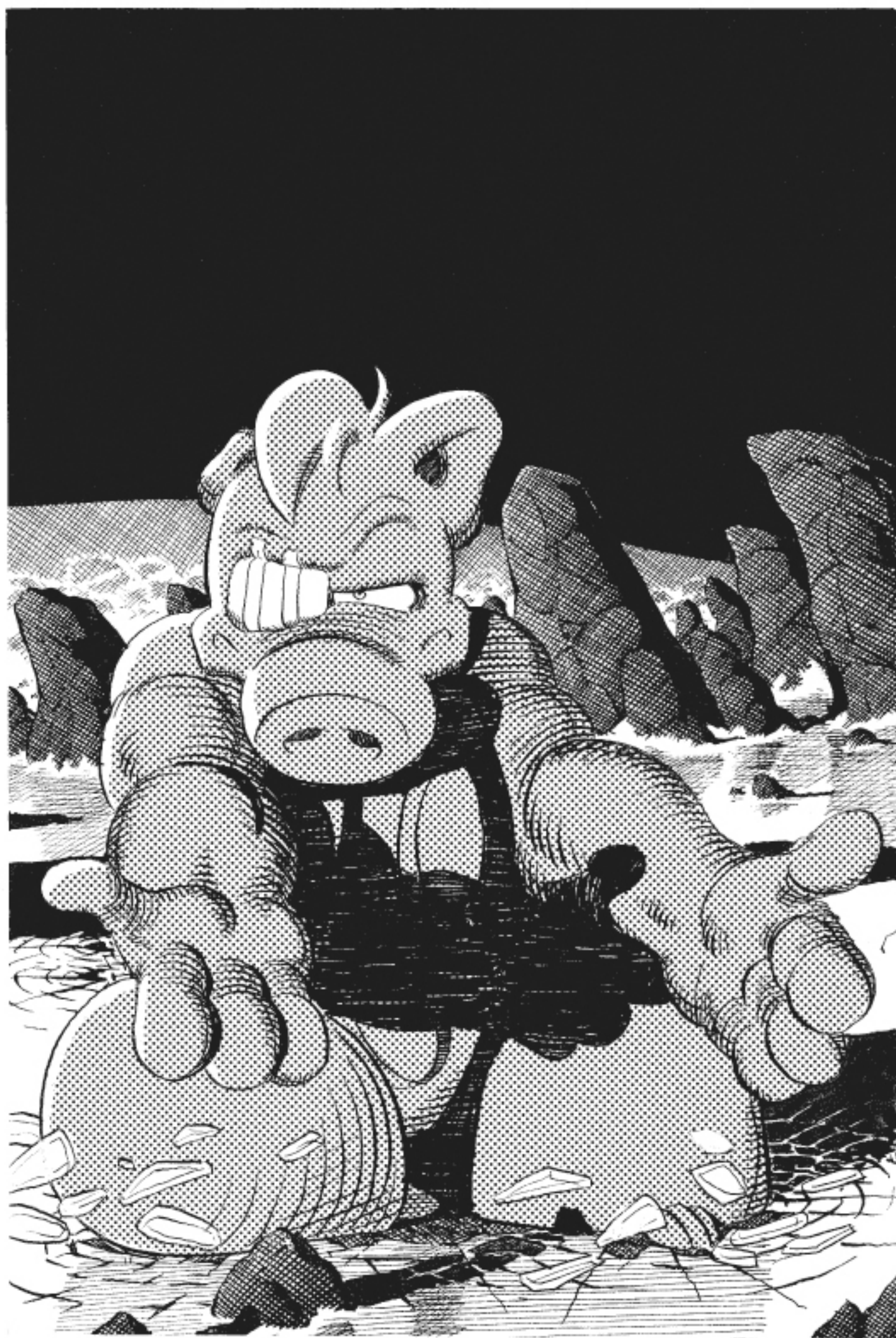
WELL, YES. BUT
YOU SAY IT THE SAME
WAY YOU'D SAY
"CEREBUS IS THREE
FEET TALL."

I JUST TOLD YOU
THAT YOU HAVE ONLY
TO DECIDE WHERE YOU
WANT TO BE AND
YOU'LL BE THERE

AND YOU STOP,
SIT DOWN AND
SAY "CEREBUS IS
A TERRIBLE
PERSON"
...

DOES THAT
SOUND LIKE A
DESTINATION
TO YOU?

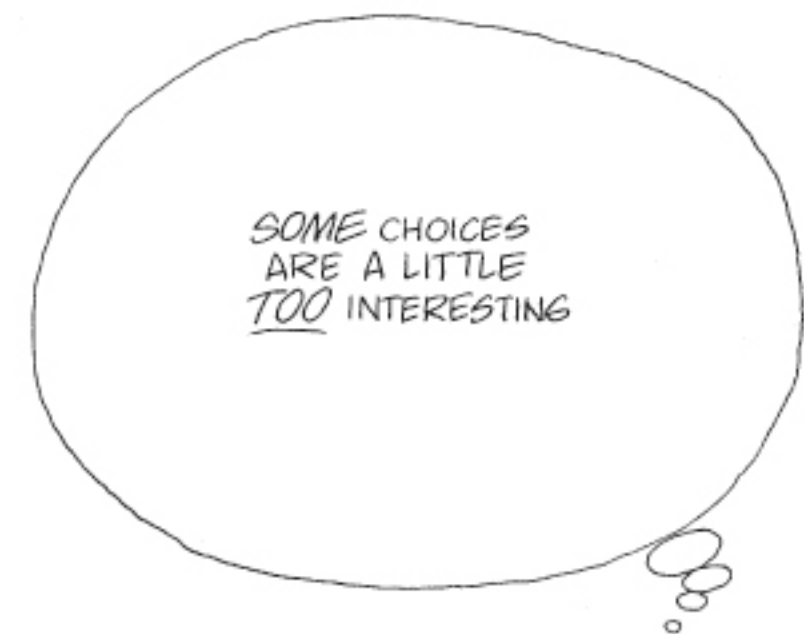




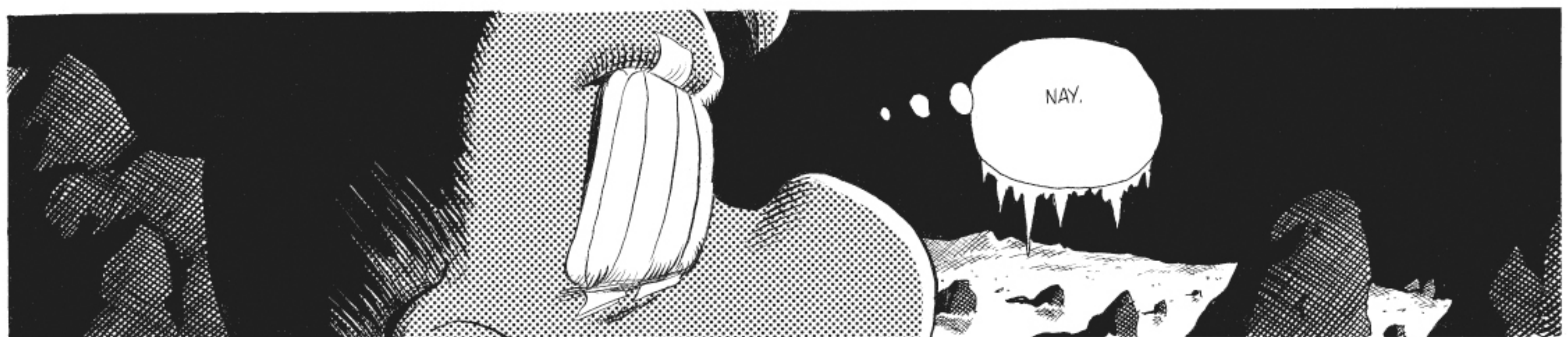
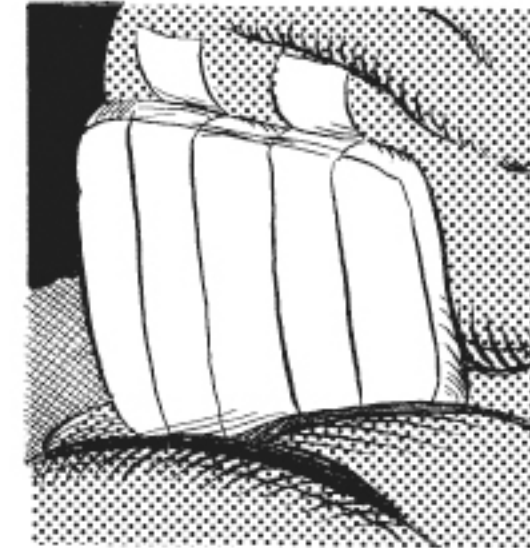


BETTER PICK
SOMEWHERE
ELSE.

TRUST
ME.



SOME CHOICES
ARE A LITTLE
TOO INTERESTING

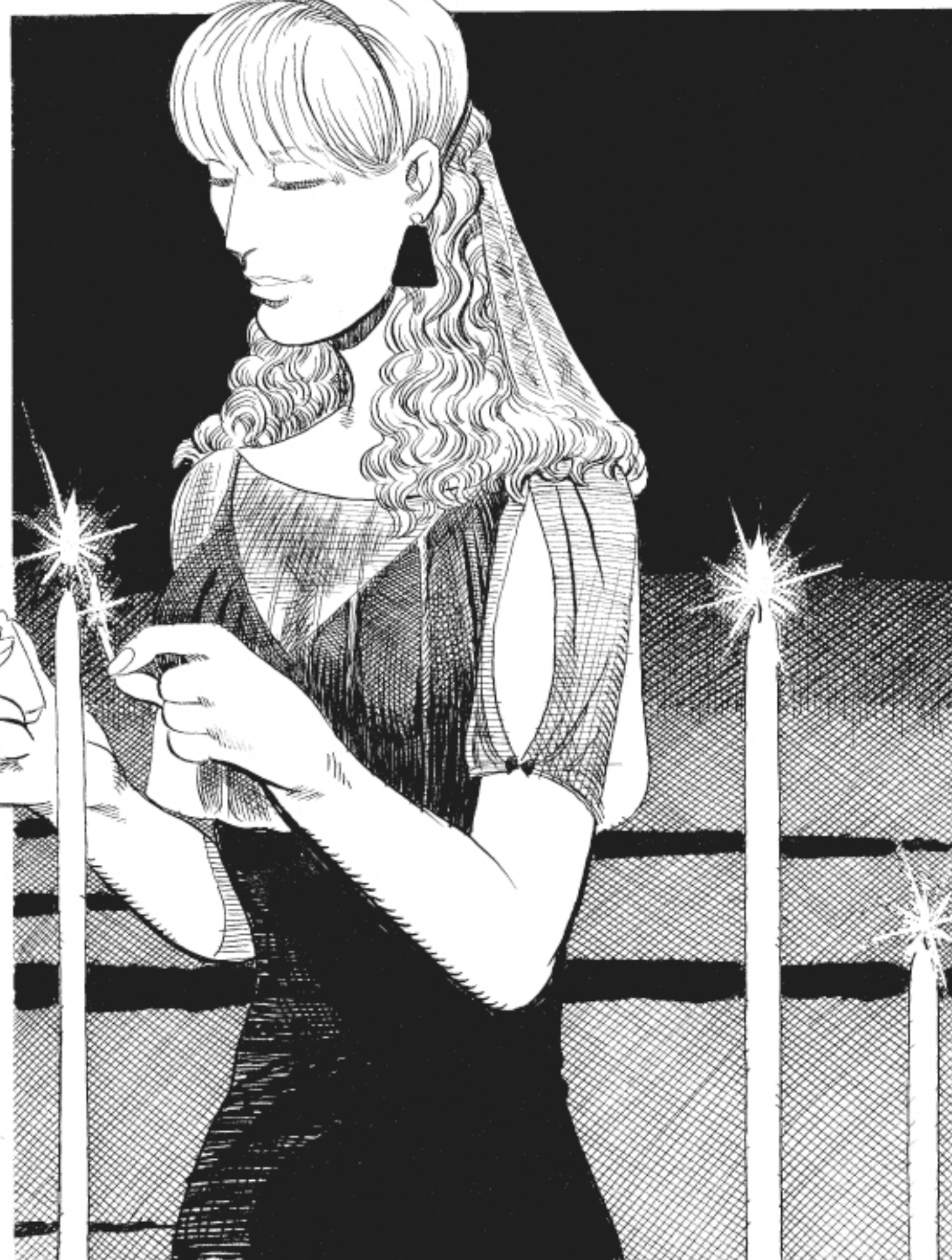
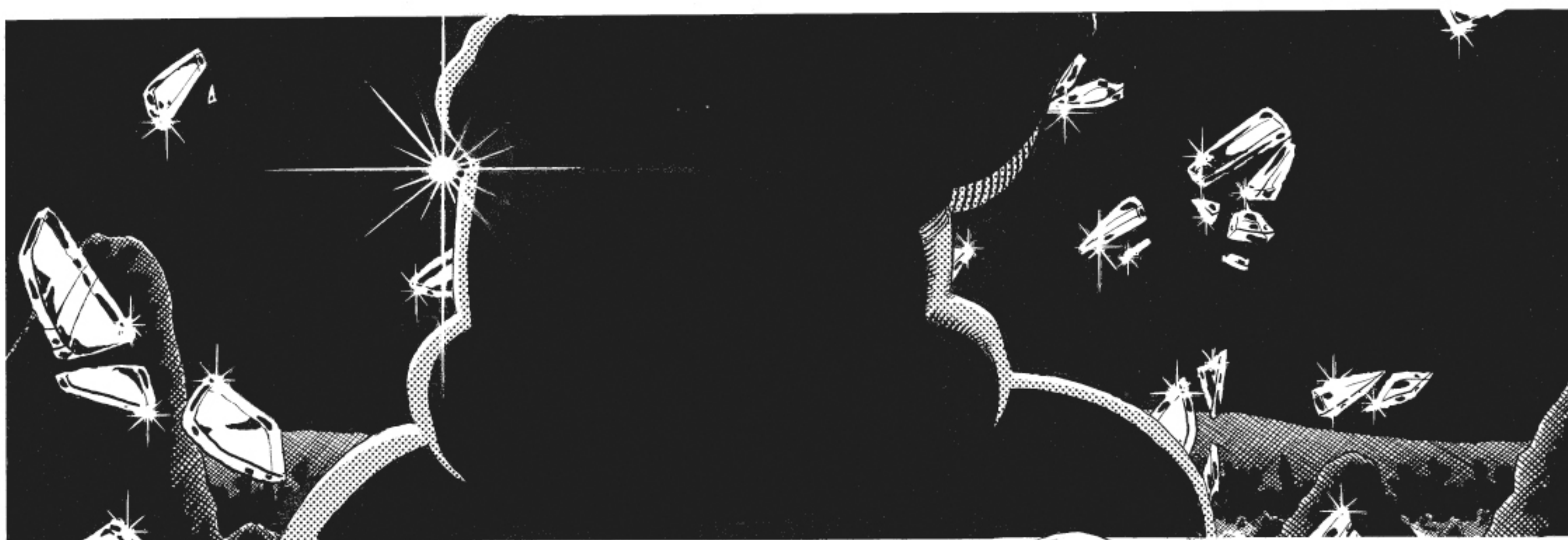


NAY.



C'MON,
MAN.

HAVEN'T YOU
HAD ENOUGH
YET?



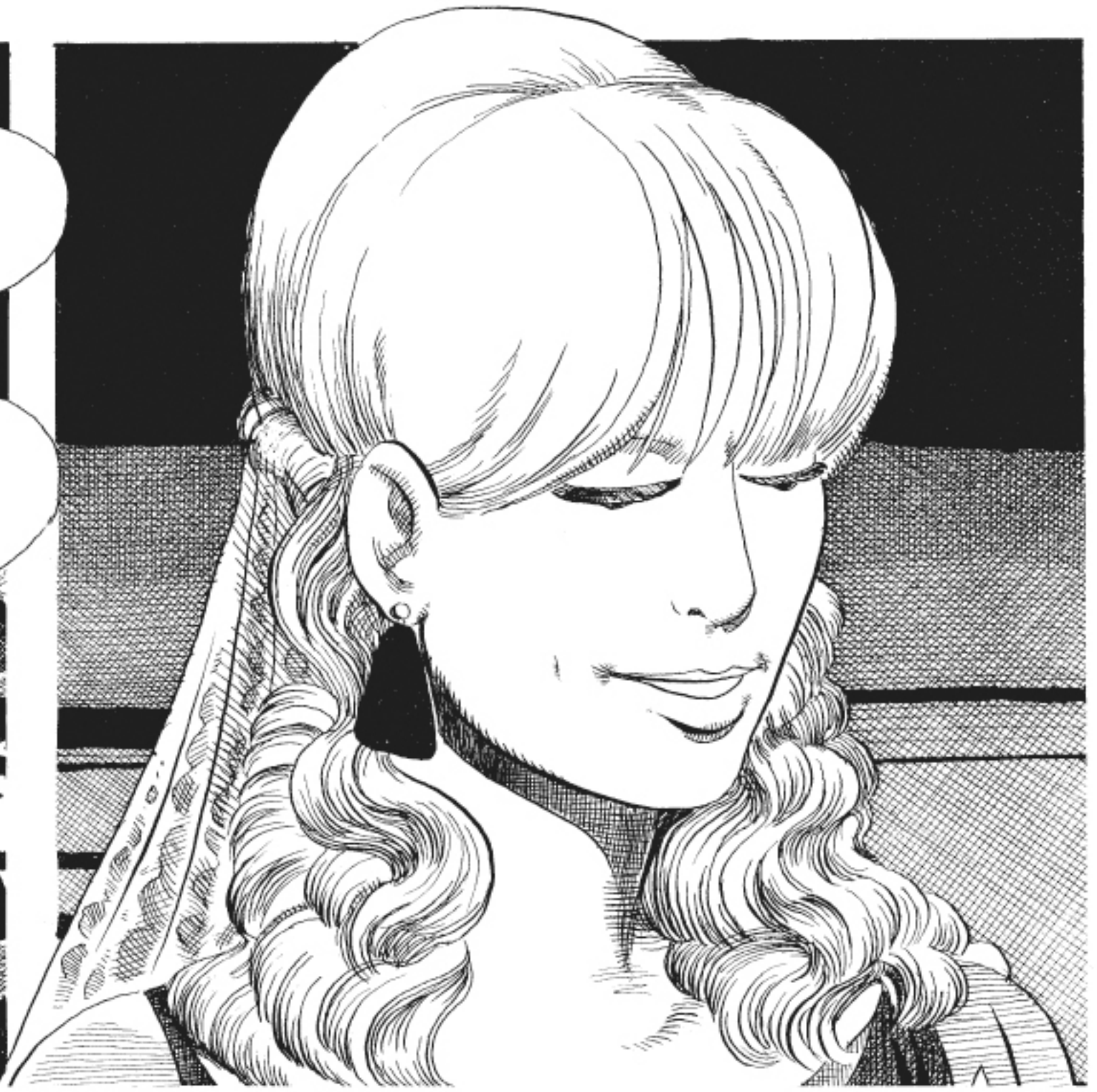


SMILING.

FANTASIZING ABOUT
THE EVENING TO
COME --

AN INTIMATE
MIDNIGHT SUPPER
WITH HER...

WHOOPS
CAREFUL



BOYFRIEND.



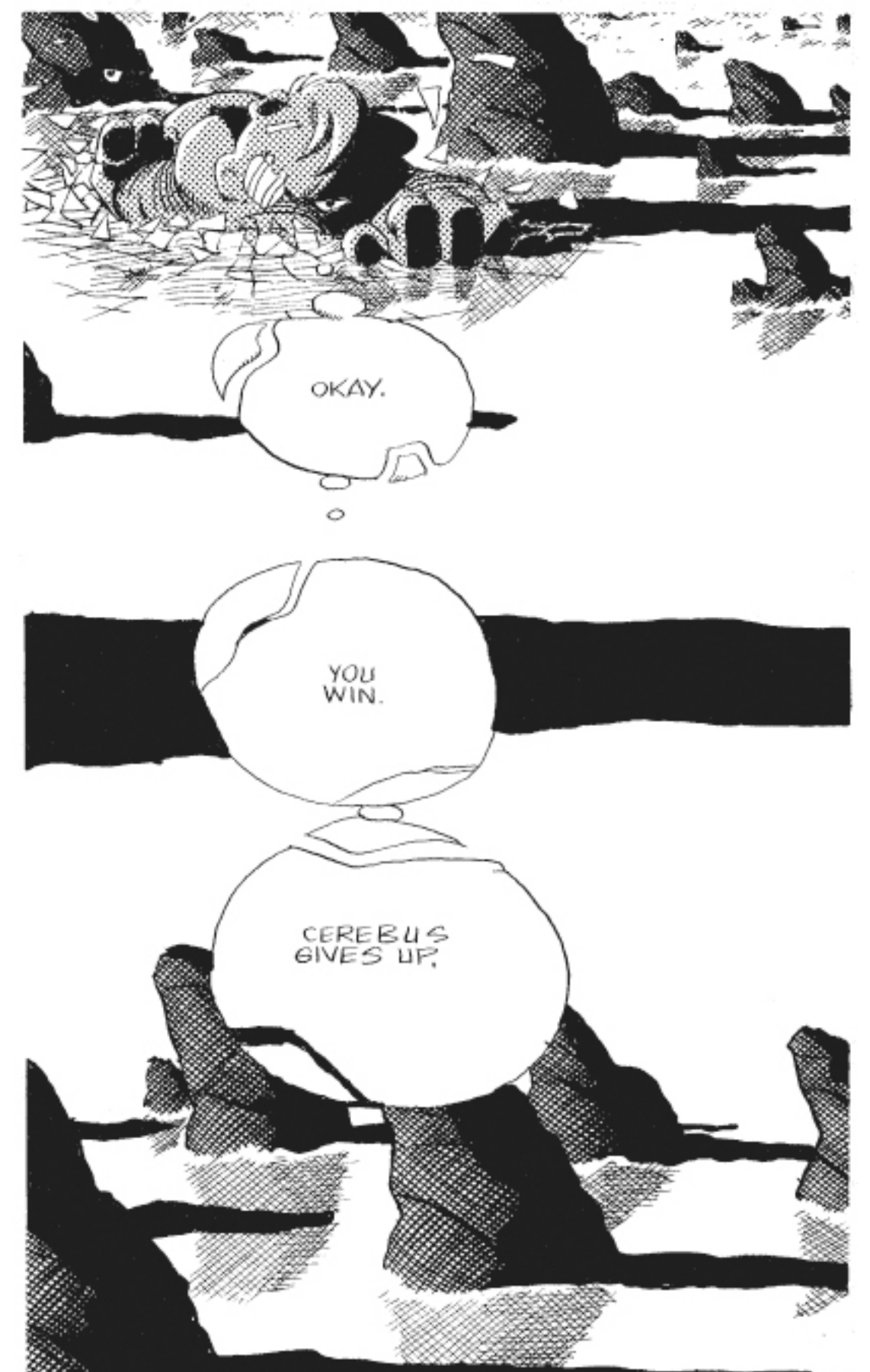
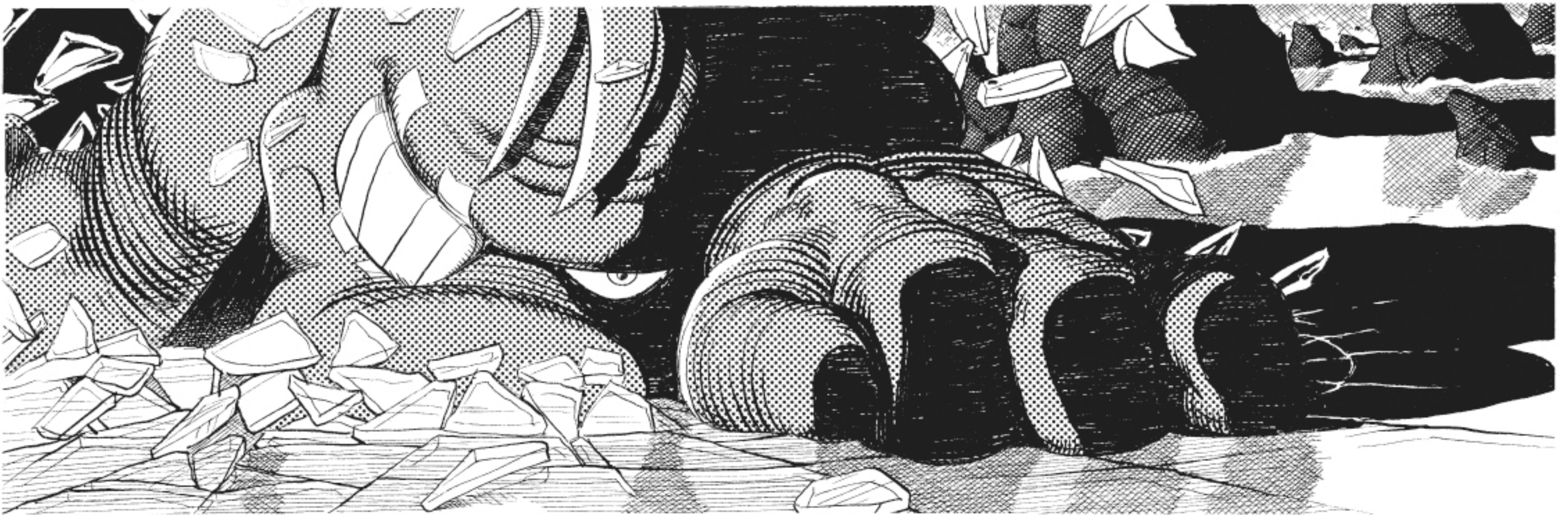
THAT'S THE FRONT
DOOR TO HER SUITE
UP AHEAD THERE.

IF YOU
HURRY...

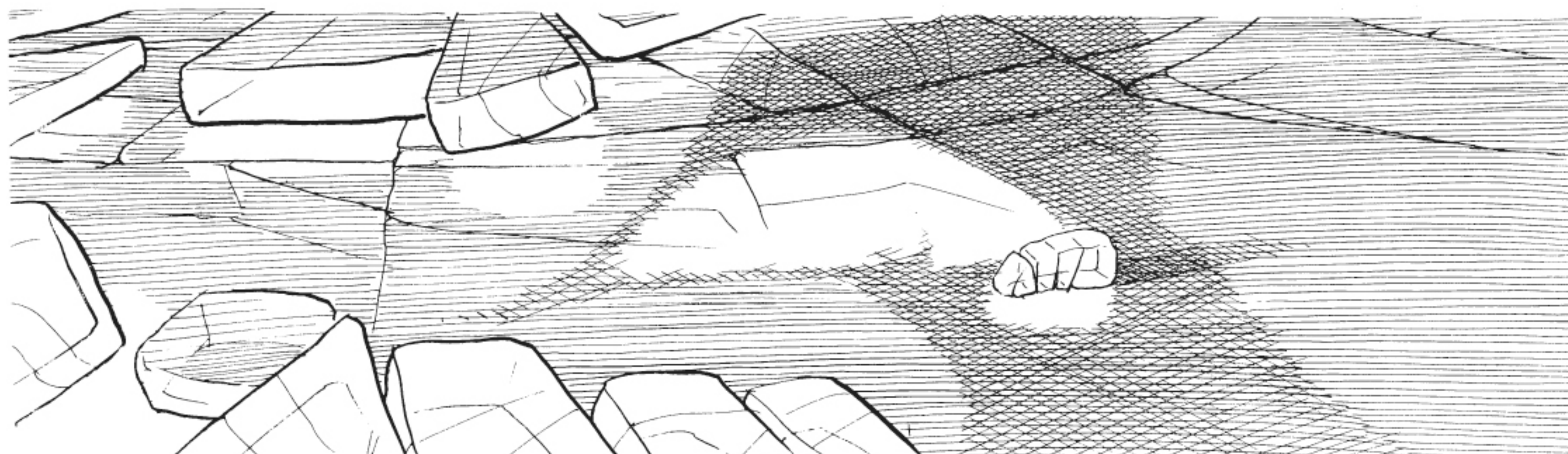
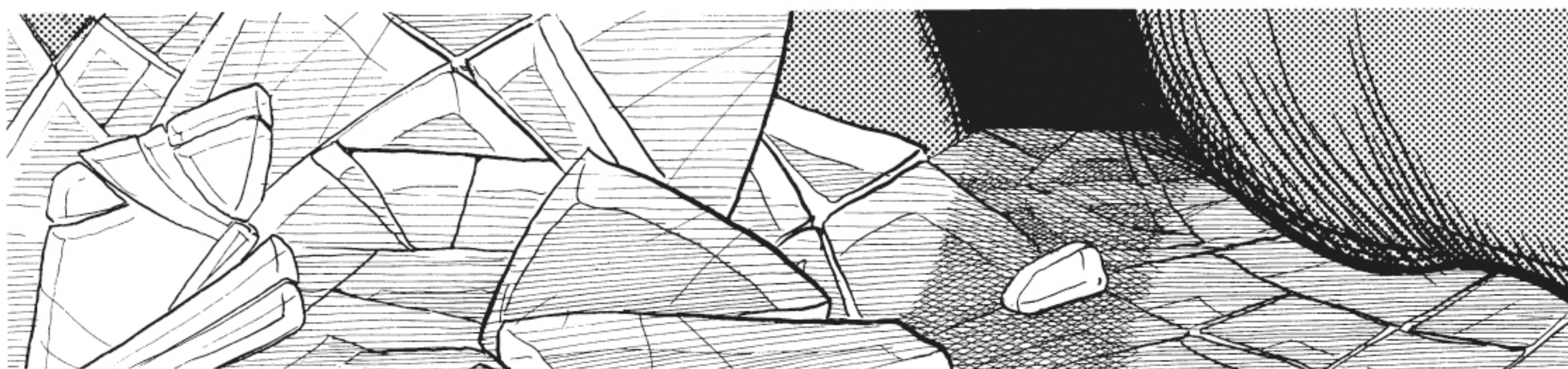
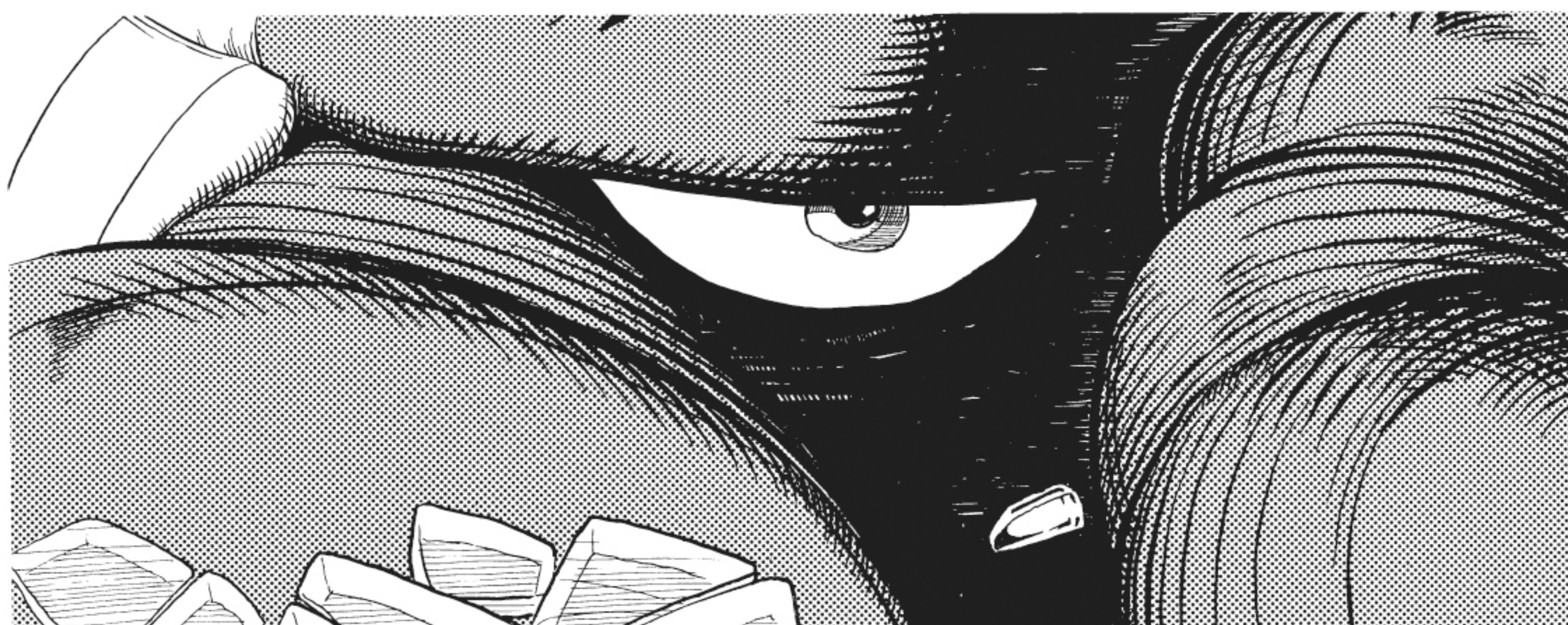
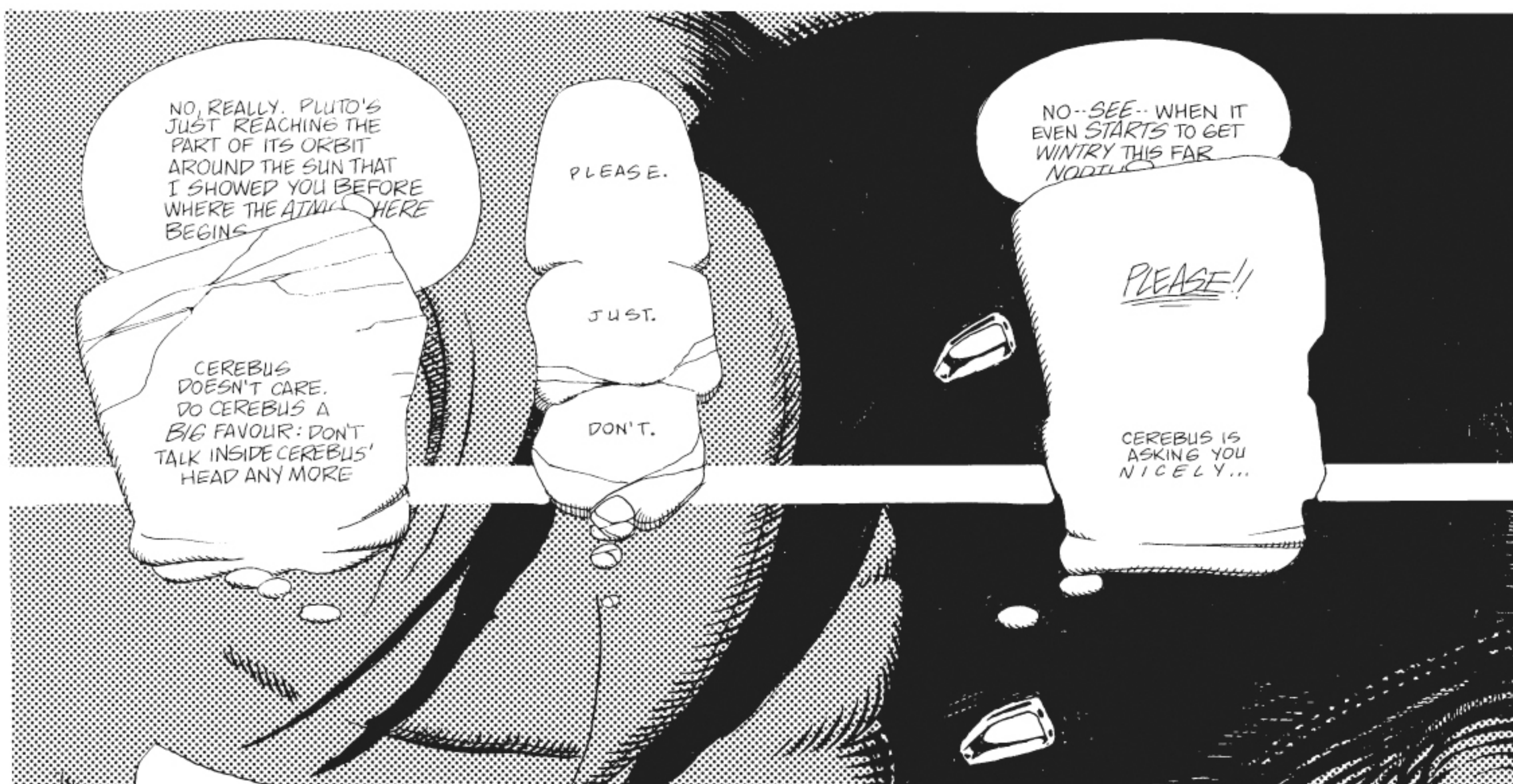
YOU'LL BE ABLE
TO BREAK IN ON
THEM...

... JUST AROUND THE
TIME THEY'RE CURLED
UP IN FRONT OF
THE FIREPLACE...

SIPPING
BRANDY.

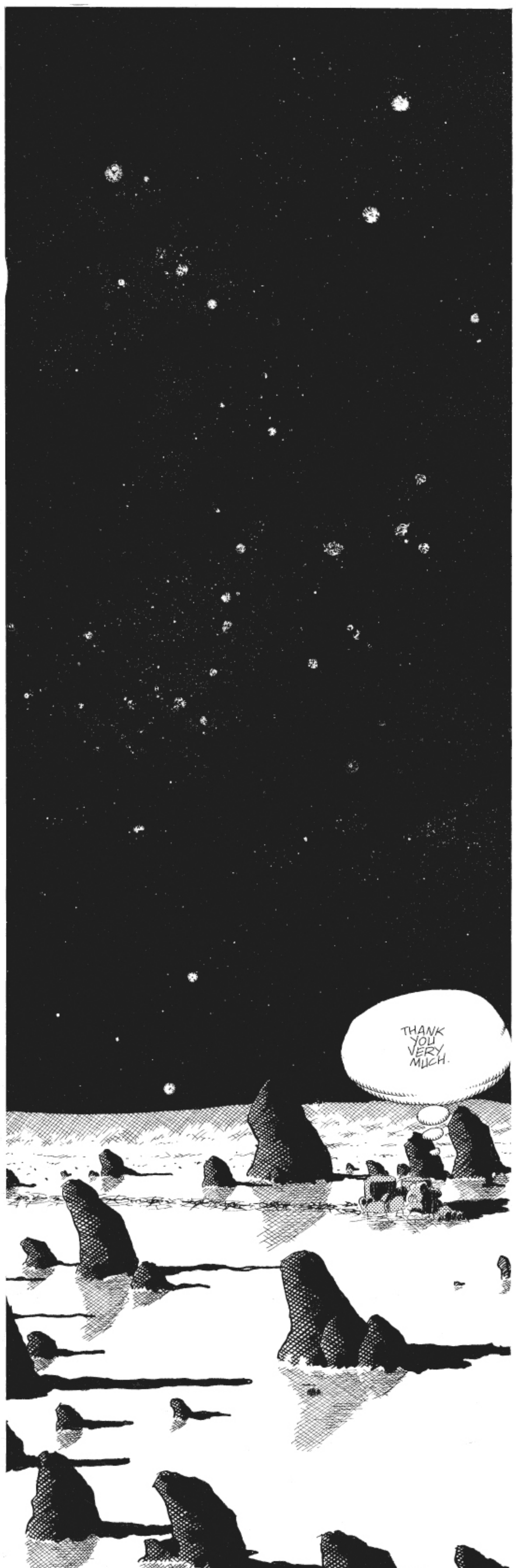




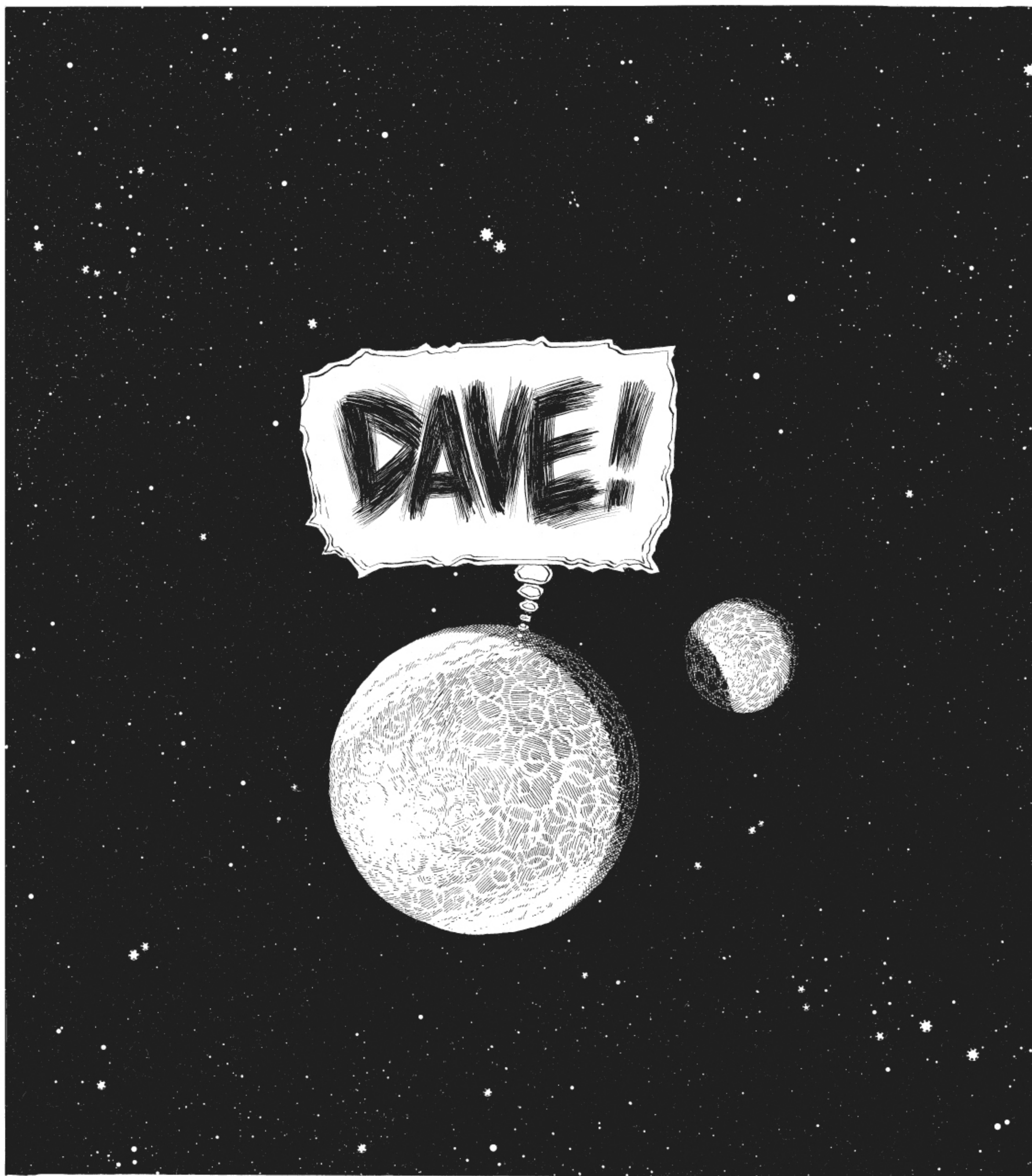


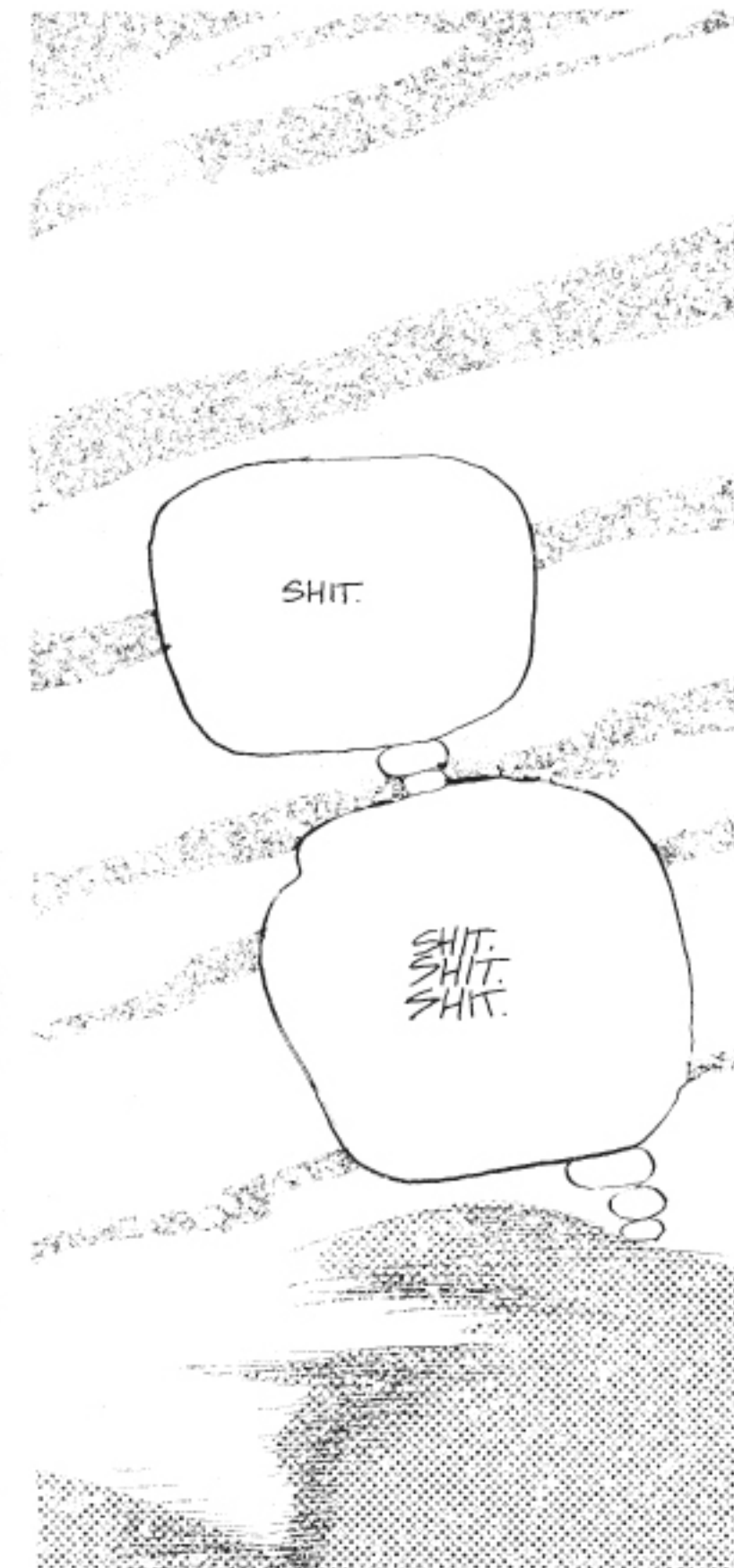
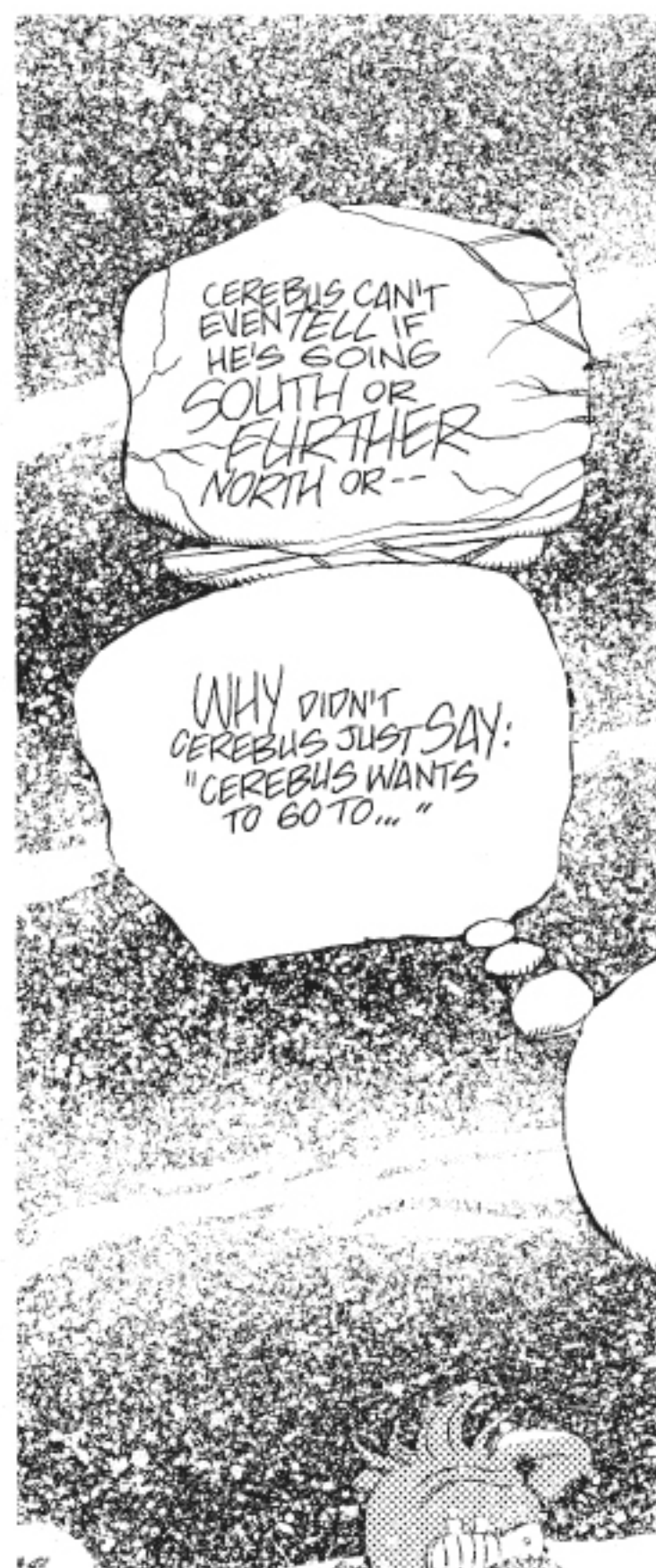


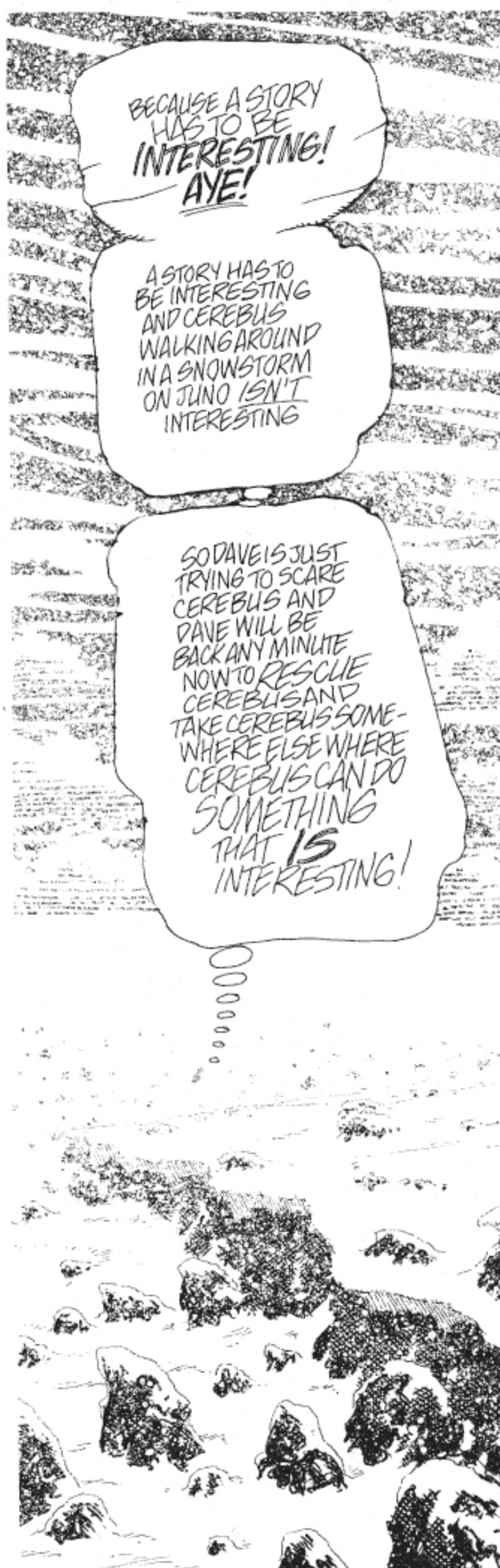
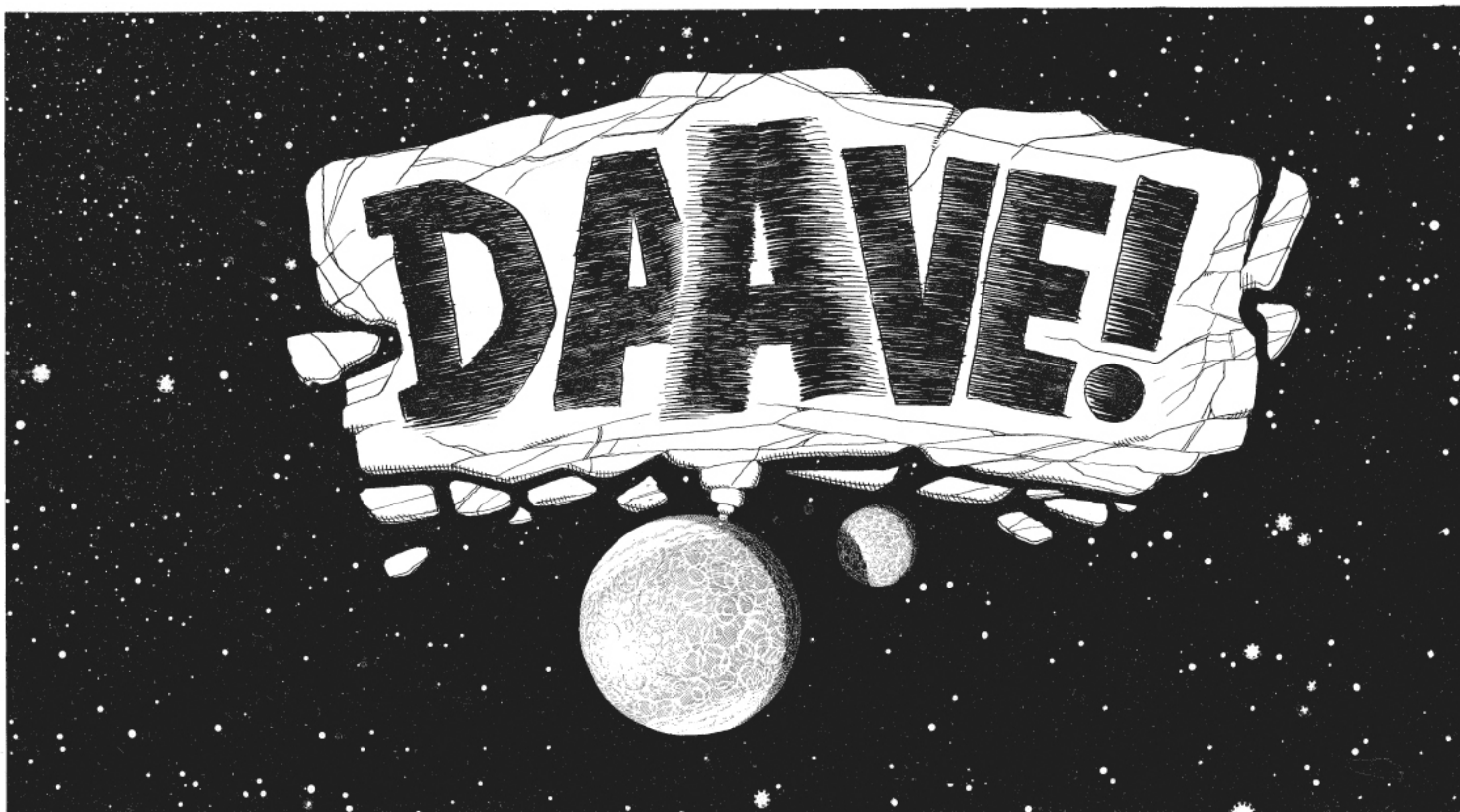




epilogue









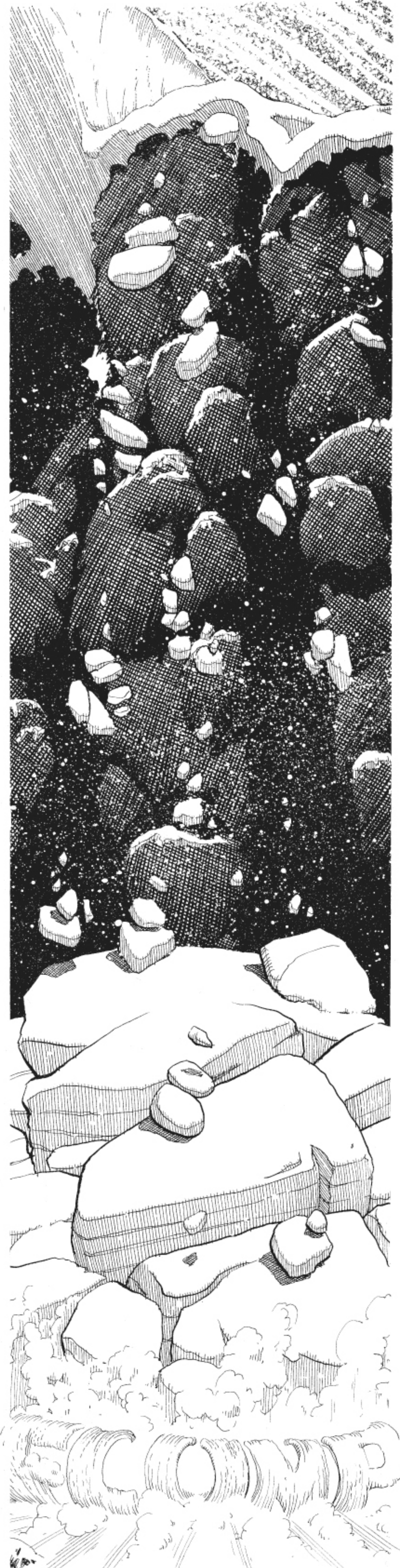
AYE.

AYE.

DAVE THINKS HE'S
SO SMART, BUT CEREBUS
HAS GOT HIM *THIS*
TIME... YESSIR.

CEREBUS WILL
JUST STAY ON THE
SHELTERED SIDE OF
THIS MOUNTAIN
AND *NOT* DO
ANYTHING
INTERESTING

AND AS SOON
AS DAVE GETS
BORED WITH
CEREBUS *NOT*
DOING ANYTHING
INTERESTING,
DAVE WILL COME
BACK AND...



You Lousy snake!
I will have you know that
I worked for all
on the

Andrew
You always do this to
me Every time I think

My dearest Andrew
While I can understand
that Miss Veronica Laloge
has had some sort of difficulty
(I mean, when doesn't she?) I
think you have your

Andrew (dear)

can't believe that a
Crown man can be
fooled by that
conniving Witch! Why
don't you open your
eyes and

Andrewkins
Why of course I
understand, my
darling. I think it's
very sweet that you
are so

dearest Andrew
I am hurt and
offended. I seen
from the cards
to the greatest
solely beca
own

I just give up That's
all. If you want to
be Miss Veronica Laloge's
handpuppet I know
exactly where she must
stick her

Andrew
I regret that your
re was somewhat
led by the mes-
Please call on
morrow - morning
evening
when hell freezes

I think of your
eyes when you said
that you care about
me, the little flocks
of gray and the way
that they caught
the late afternoon
light. I

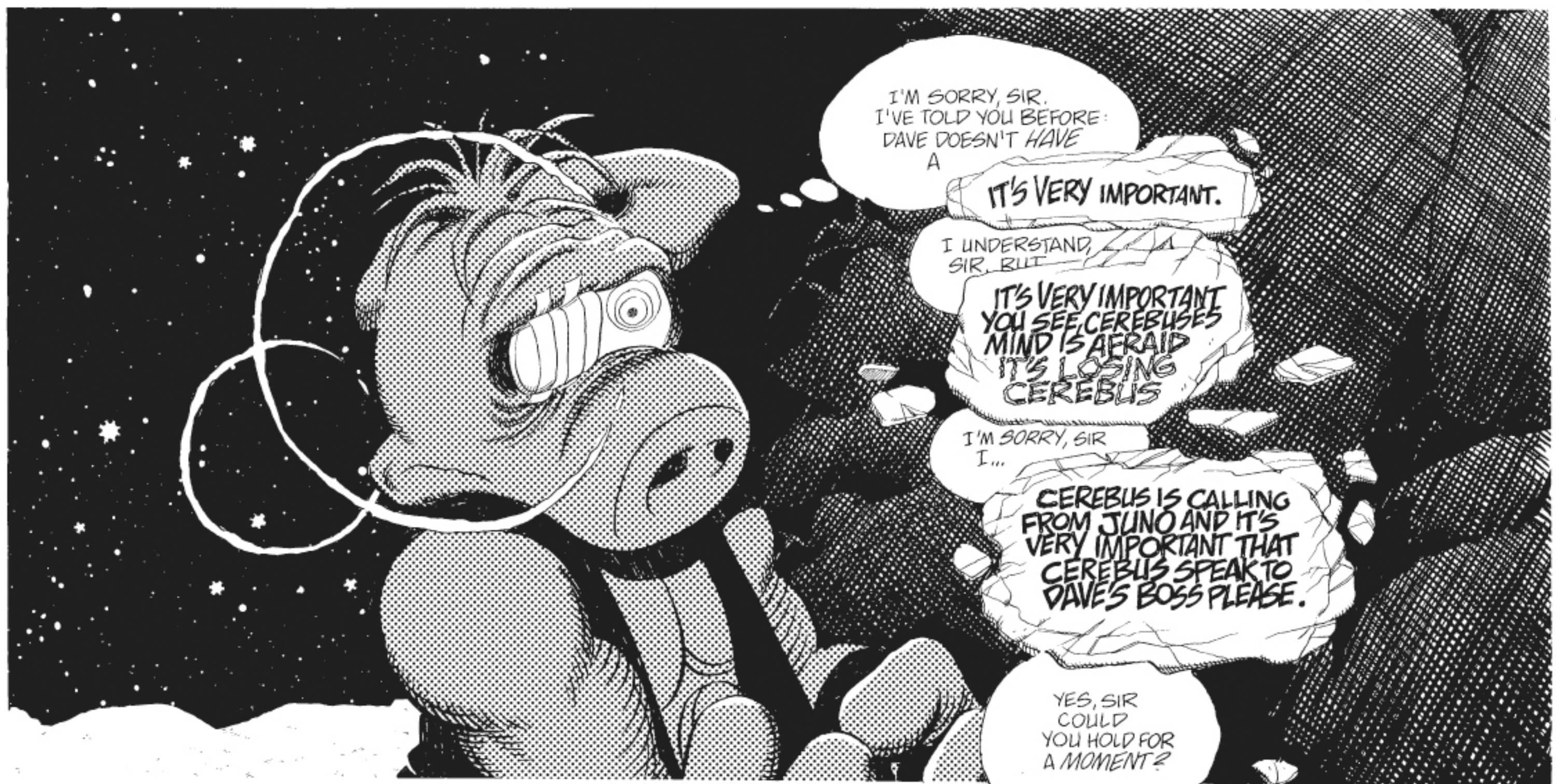
Dear Mr. Archibald
Having reviewed my
daily appointments
book, I find no mention
of a "Midnight supper"
Consequently, I've come to
the inescapable conclusion
that you've lost
your
Fucking
mind

new
simply won't be
eaten this way
Goodbye and good
riddance!
all my love
forever

how you would react if
I had cancelled our
dinner on one hour's
notice? You would be
completely understanding
- so that makes me a
Bawms
Jealous
Lunatic







I'M SORRY, SIR.
I'VE TOLD YOU BEFORE:
DAVE DOESN'T HAVE
A

IT'S VERY IMPORTANT.

I UNDERSTAND,
SIR, BUT

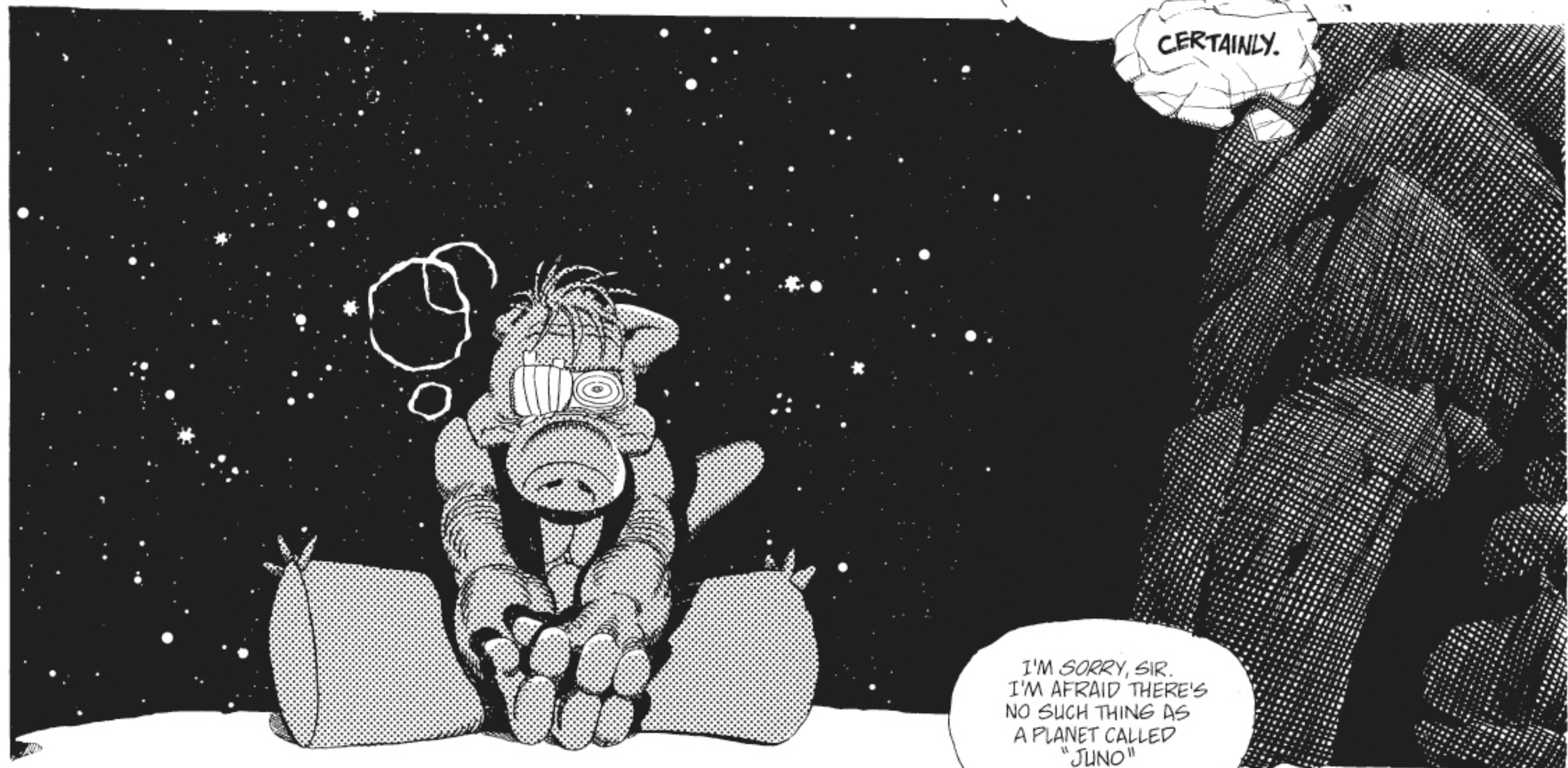
IT'S VERY IMPORTANT
YOU SEE, CEREBUS'S
MIND IS AFRAID
IT'S LOSING
CEREBUS

I'M SORRY, SIR
I...

CEREBUS IS CALLING
FROM JUNO AND IT'S
VERY IMPORTANT THAT
CEREBUS SPEAK TO
DAVE'S BOSS PLEASE.

YES, SIR
COULD
YOU HOLD FOR
A MOMENT?

CERTAINLY.



I'M SORRY, SIR.
I'M AFRAID THERE'S
NO SUCH THING AS
A PLANET CALLED
"JUNO"

THERE
ISN'T?

NO, SIR. I'M
AFRAID NOT.

ARE YOU
SURE?

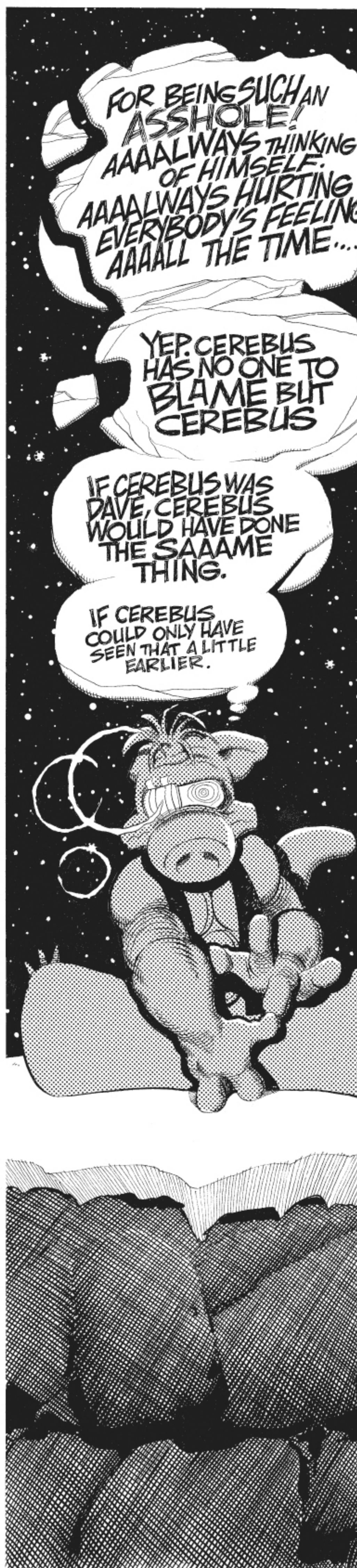
YES, SIR,
QUITE
SURE.

IN THAT CASE CEREBUS IS
SORRY TO HAVE BOTHERED
YOU. THANK YOU ANYWAY.

NO BOTHER AT
ALL, SIR. YOU
HAVE A NICE
DAY NOW.

YOU TOO.
GOODBYE.

GOODBYE,
SIR.



ALL CEREBUS HAD
TO DO WAS SAY:
"DAVE, YOU'RE RIGHT.
IT'S TIME CEREBUS
STOPPED BEING SUCH
A-- A-- "

AN
ASSHOLE.

"SUCH AN ASSHOLE.
PLEASE. CEREBUS
JUST WANTS TO... "

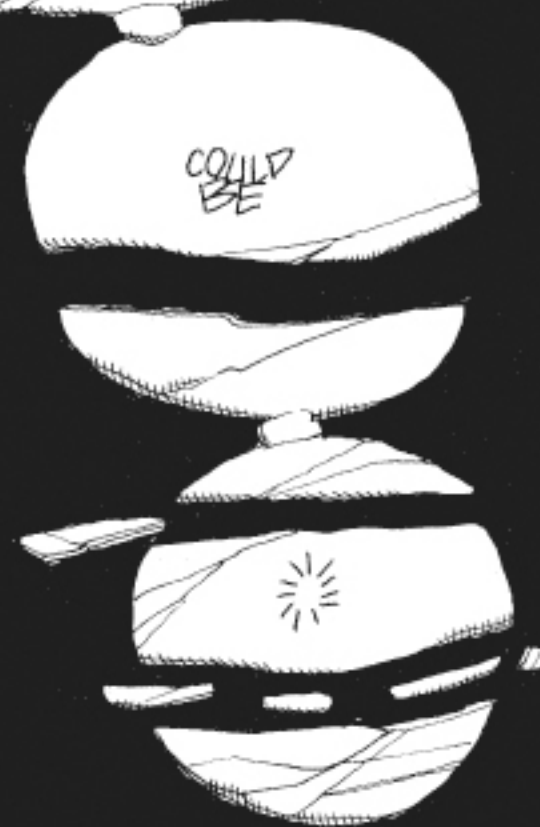


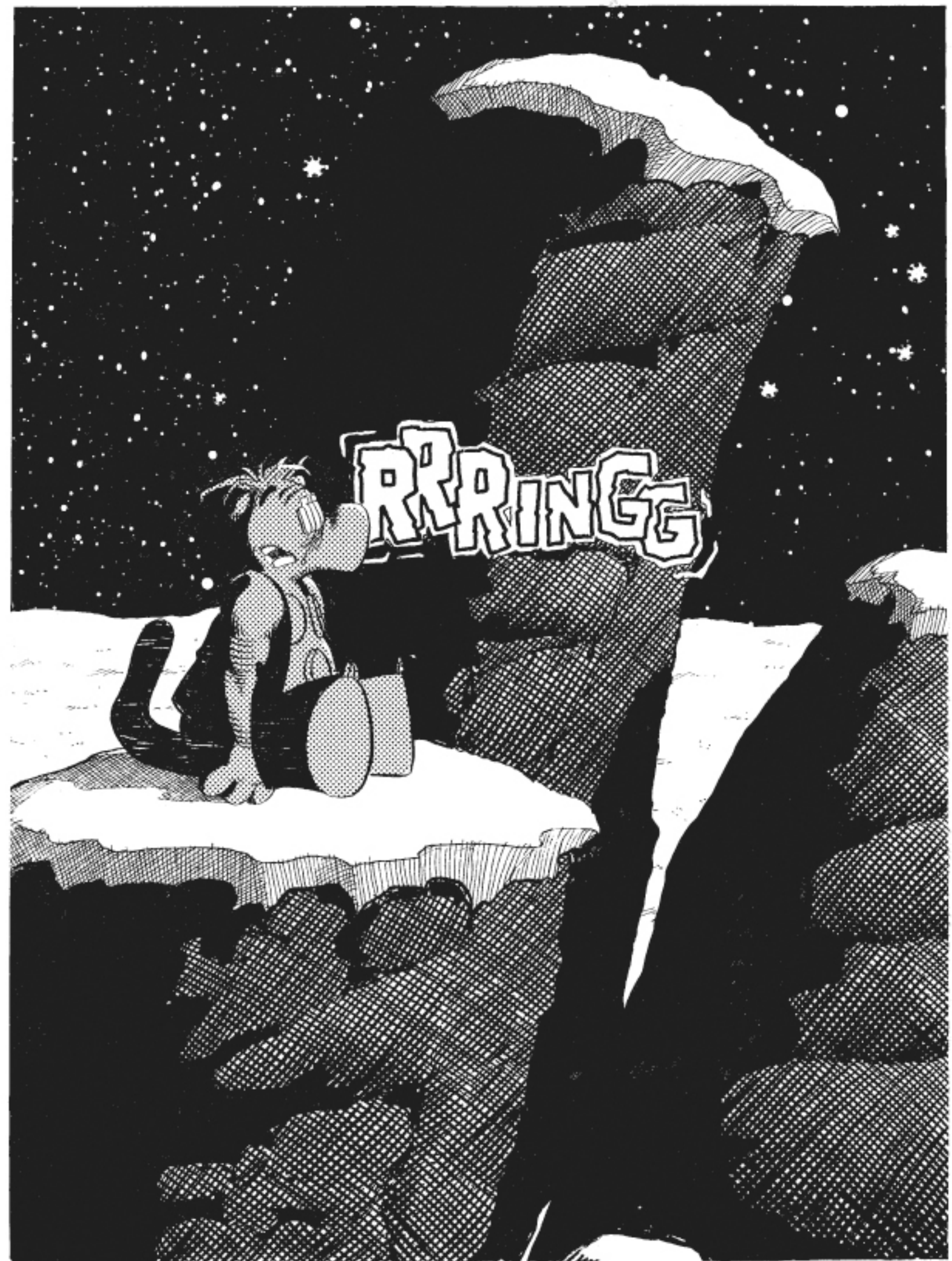
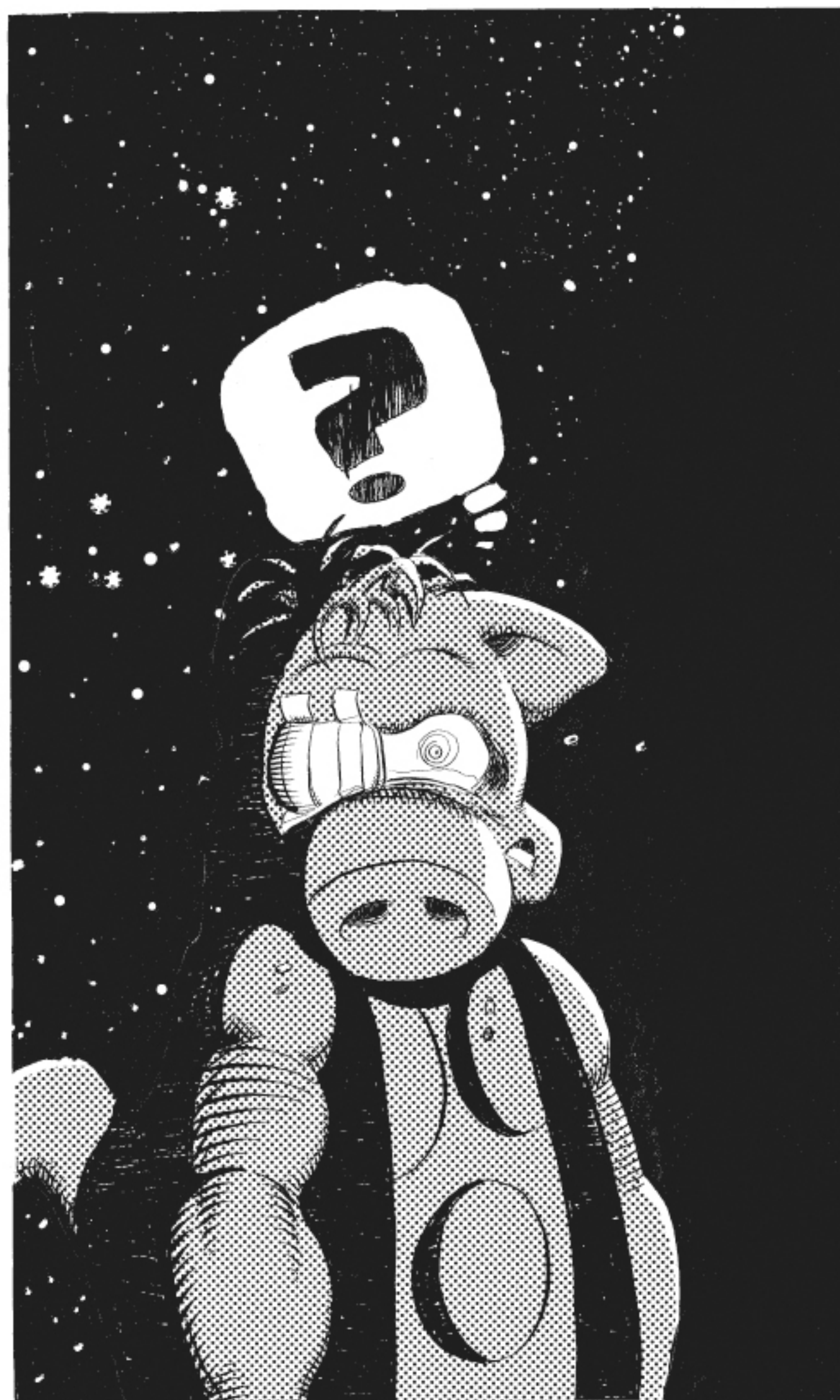
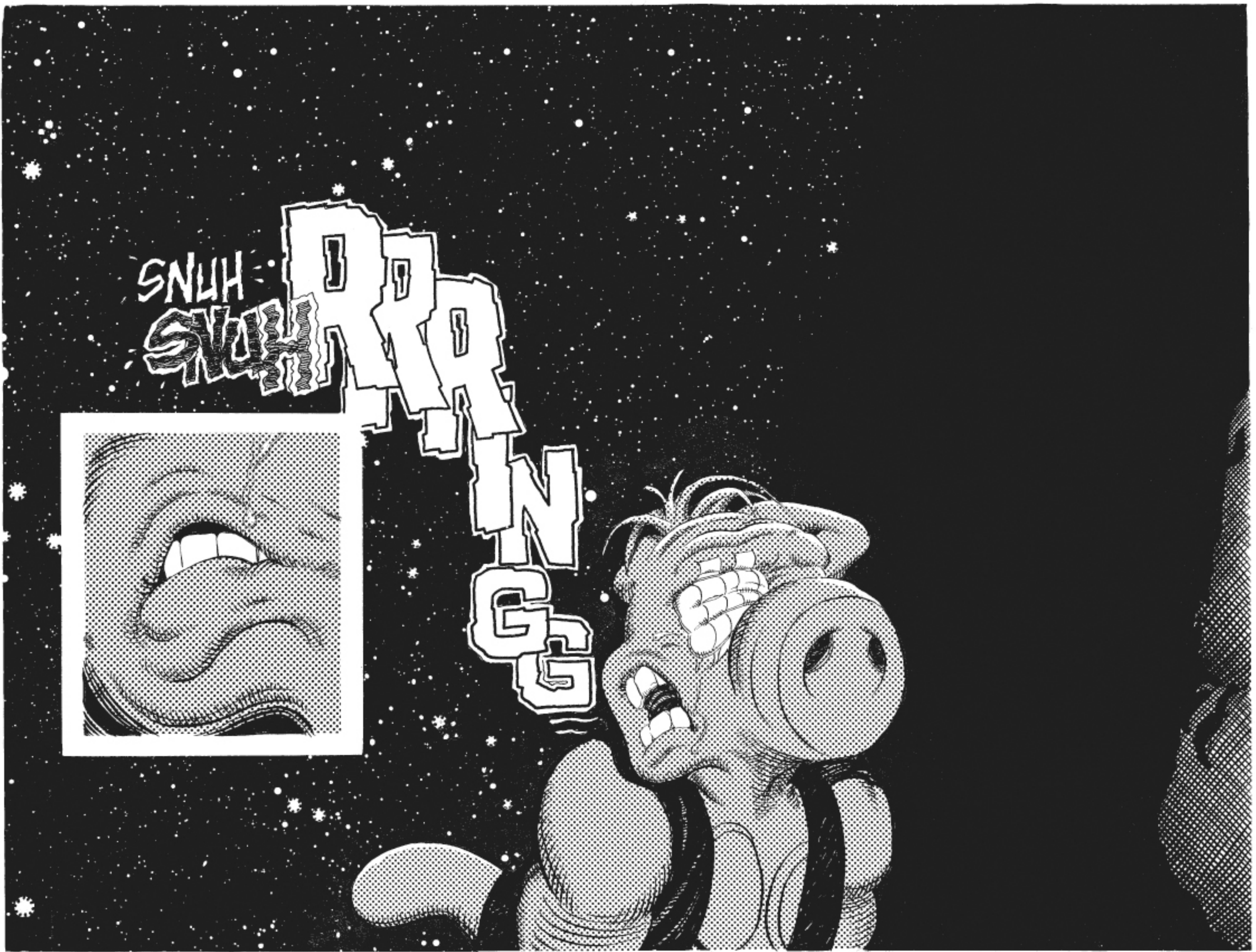
"CEREBUS JUST WANTS
TO GO BACK-- BACK
TO THAT LITTLE TAVERN
NEAR CASTLE WALLIS AT
THE WALL OF TSI"

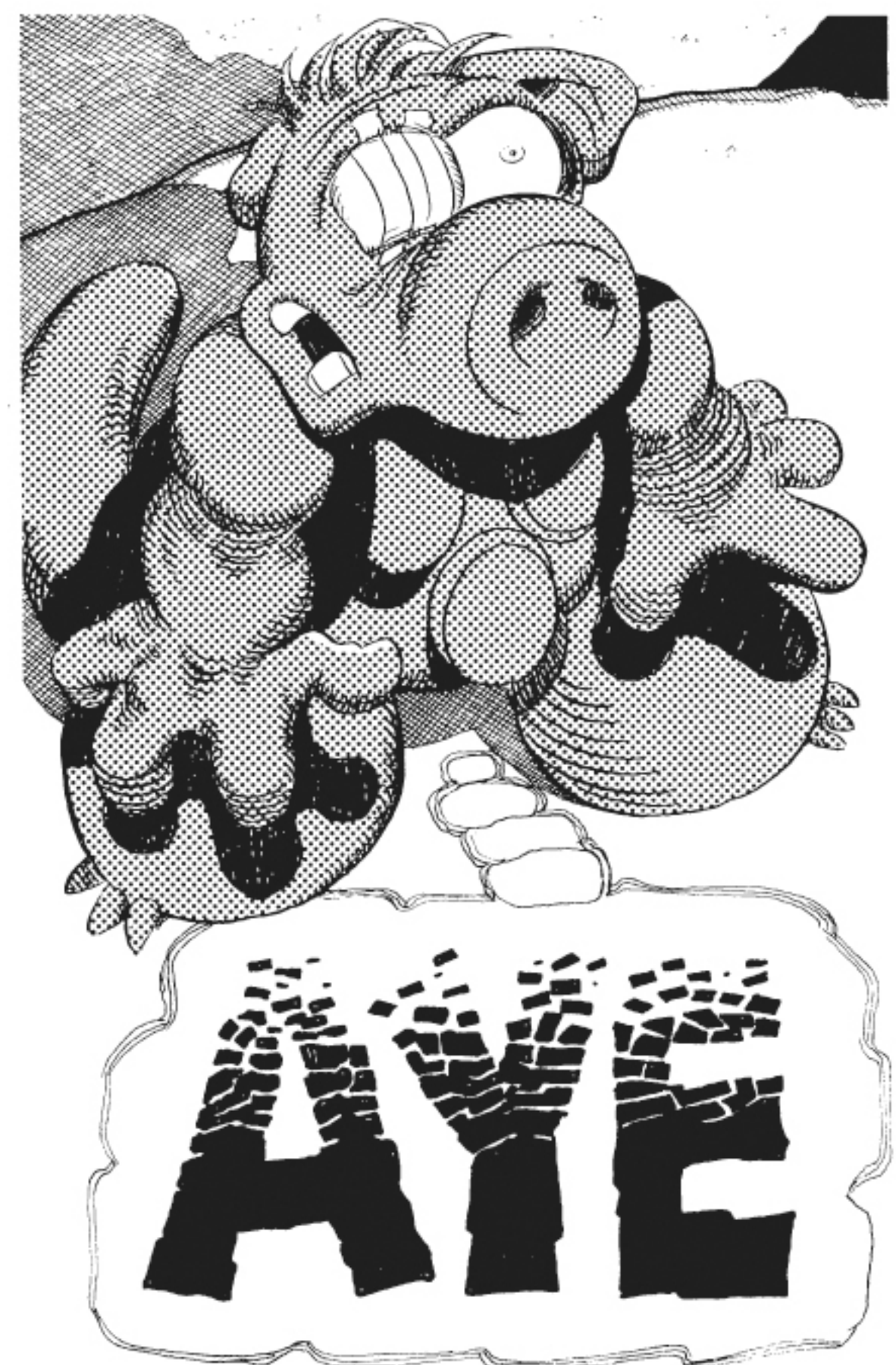
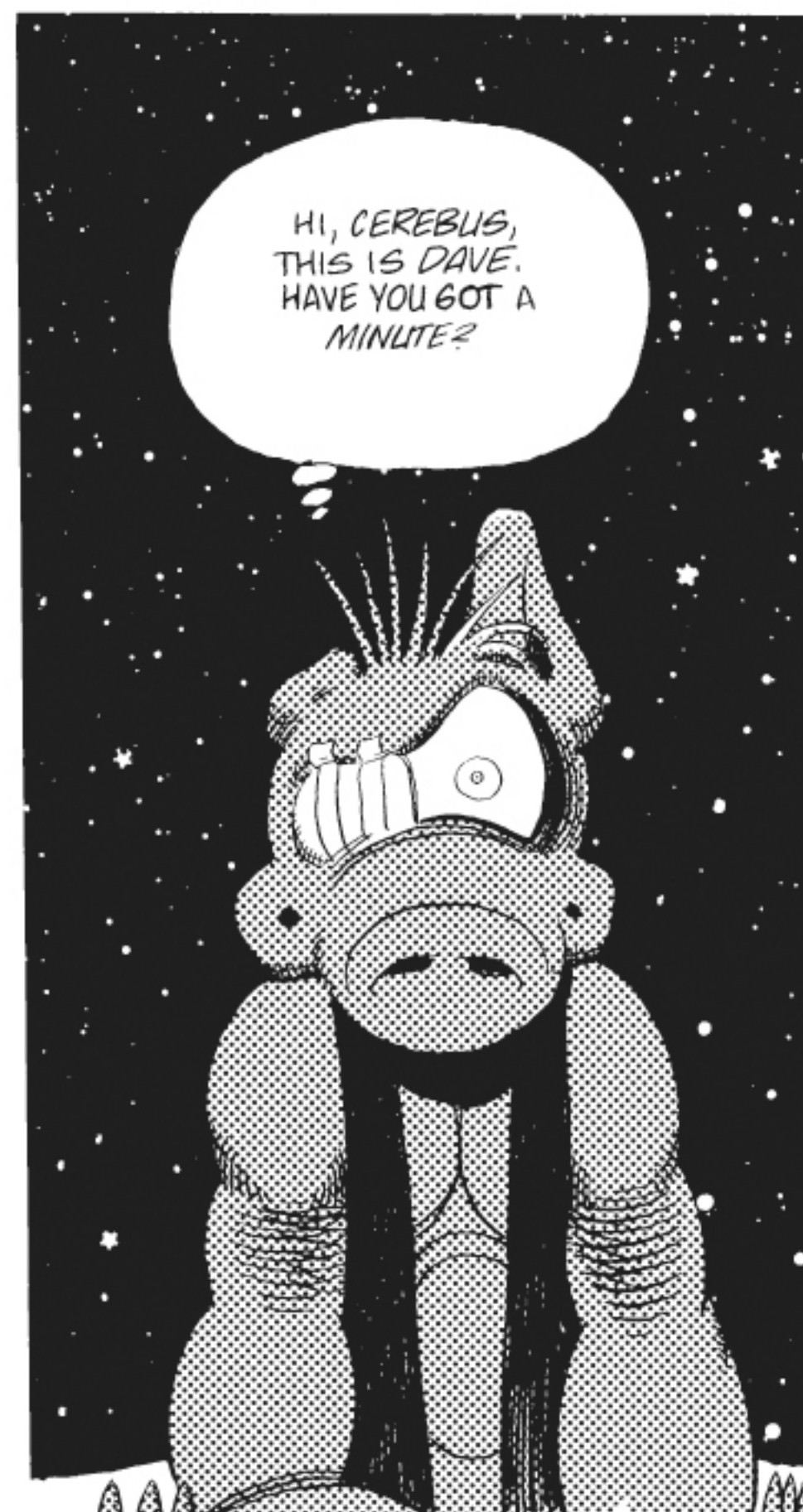
"THE ONE CEREBUS
WENT TO WITH BEAR
YEARS AGO."

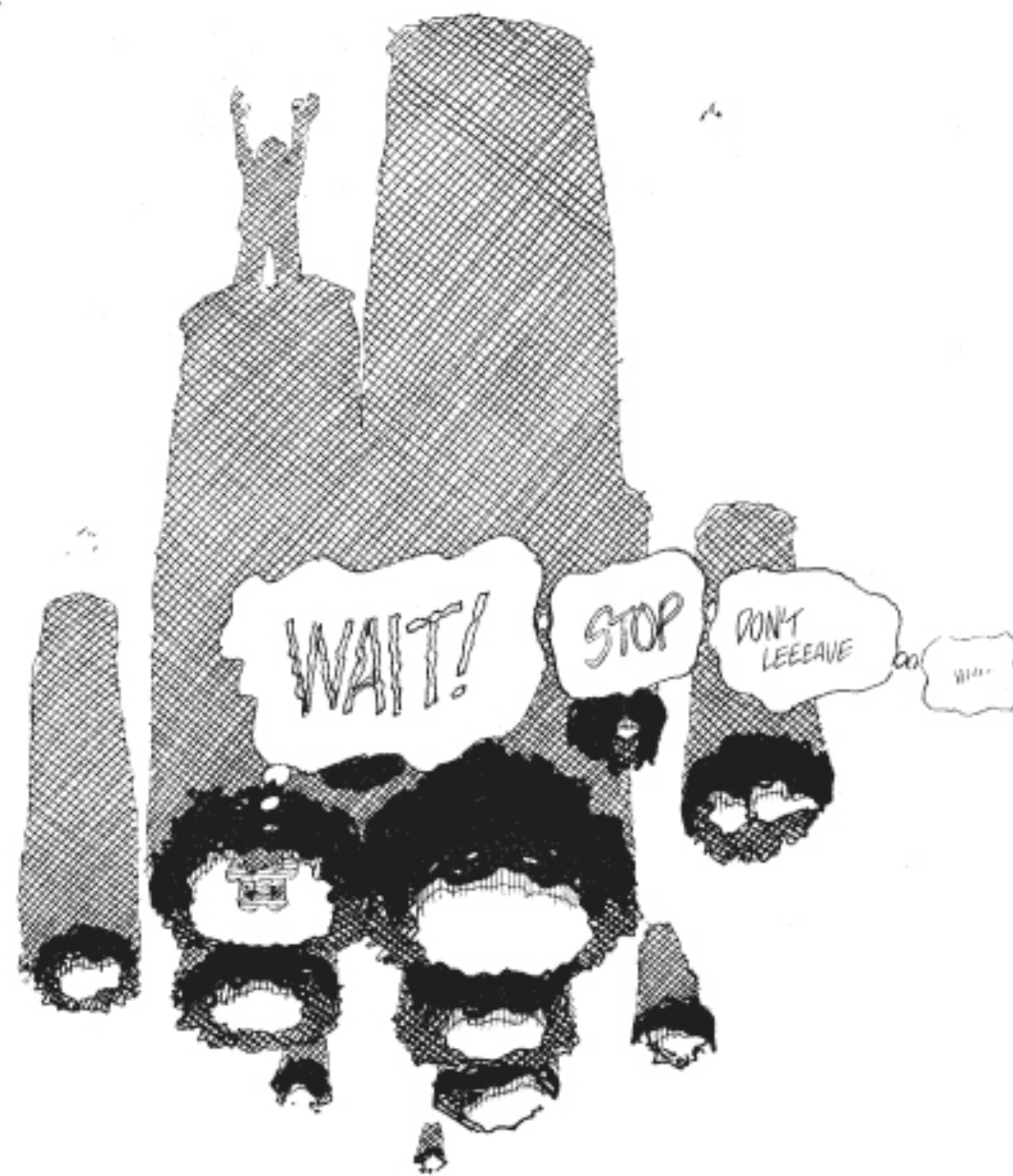
IF CEREBUS
HAD JUST SAID
THAT-- RIGHT NOW
CEREBUS COULD
BE ...

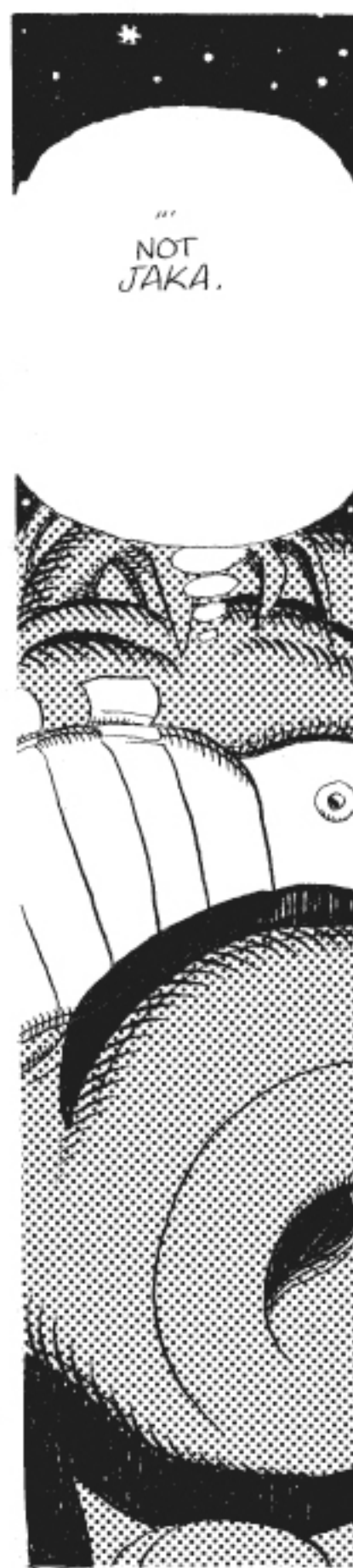
COULD
BE











PLEASE,
DAVE

PLEASE SEND
CEREBUS BACK
TO ESTARCION.

TO
ESTARCION.

NOT
JAKA.

CEREBUS
FINALLY
UNDERSTANDS.

YOU
DO?

OH,
AYE.

CEREBUS HAS WASTED
YEARS--YEARS--WAITING
FOR SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T
LOVE HIM -- WHO PROBABLY
NEVER DID LOVE HIM --
TO COME BACK

"ALONE.
UNMOURNED
AND UNLOVED."

THAT'S WHAT
THE JUDGE MEANT,
ISN'T IT?

IF CEREBUS KEEPS
JUST... WAITING...
FOR JAKA TO COME
BACK, CEREBUS
IS ALWAYS GOING
TO BE ALONE.

IF CEREBUS NEVER
MAKES FRIENDS WITH ANY-
ONE, HOW CAN CEREBUS
EXPECT TO BE ANYTHING
BUT "UNMOURNED"?

IF CEREBUS NEVER
TRIES TO LOVE ANYONE
BESIDES JAKA, WHO'S
GOING TO LOVE
CEREBUS BACK?

RIGHT?



AYE-- CEREBUS UNDERSTANDS NOW, DAVE.

CEREBUS IS SORRY HE CALLED YOU "EVIL", IF YOU HADN'T SHOWED CEREBUS WHAT YOU SHOWED HIM -- CEREBUS WOULD HAVE JUST WASTED THE REST OF HIS LIFE WAITING FOR JAKA -- CEREBUS SINCERELY APOLOGIZES.

IT'S NOT THE FIRST TIME I'VE BEEN CALLED "EVIL" AND I DOUBT IT WILL BE THE LAST -- BUT (ANYWAY) --

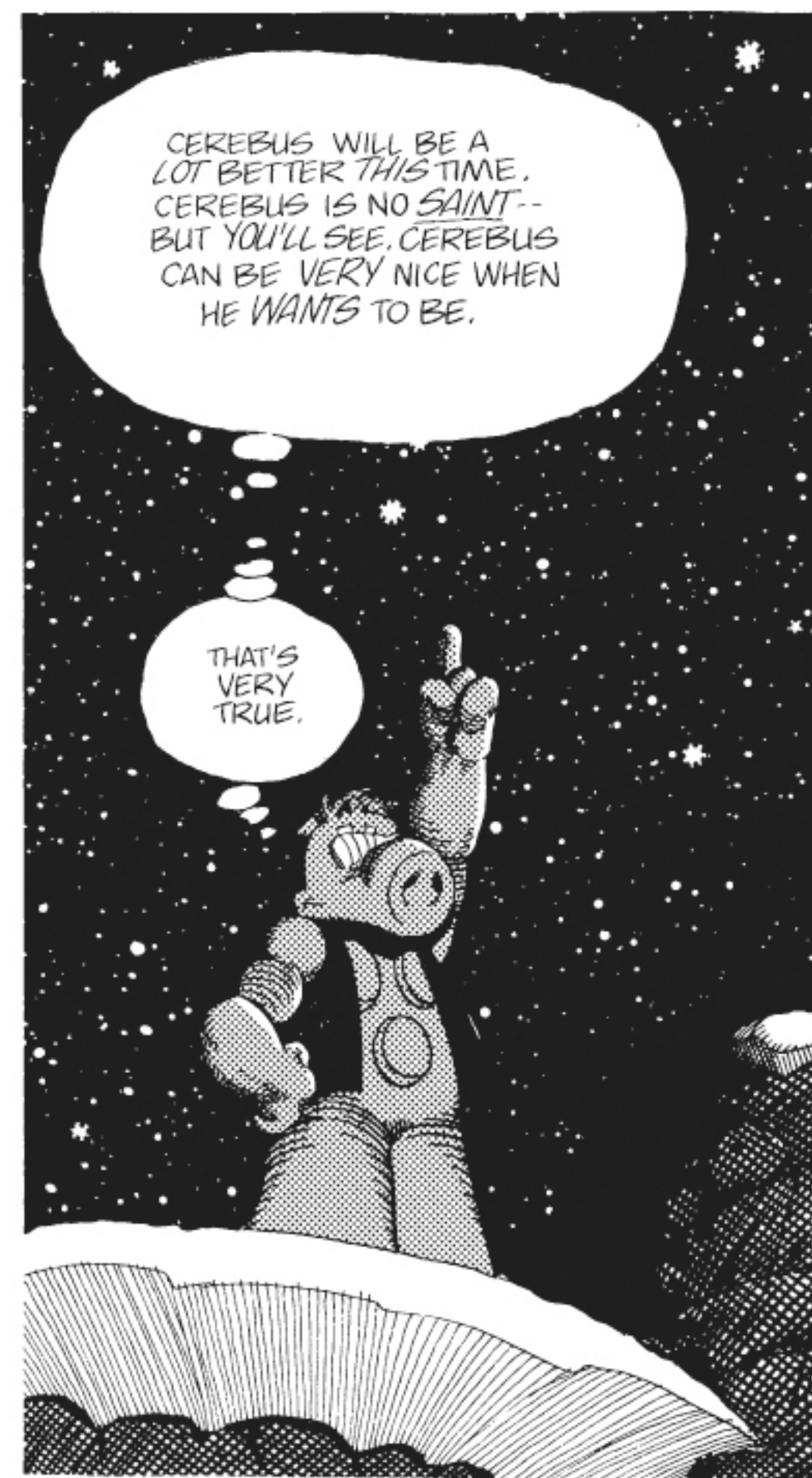
APOLOGY ACCEPTED.

AYE? GOOD.



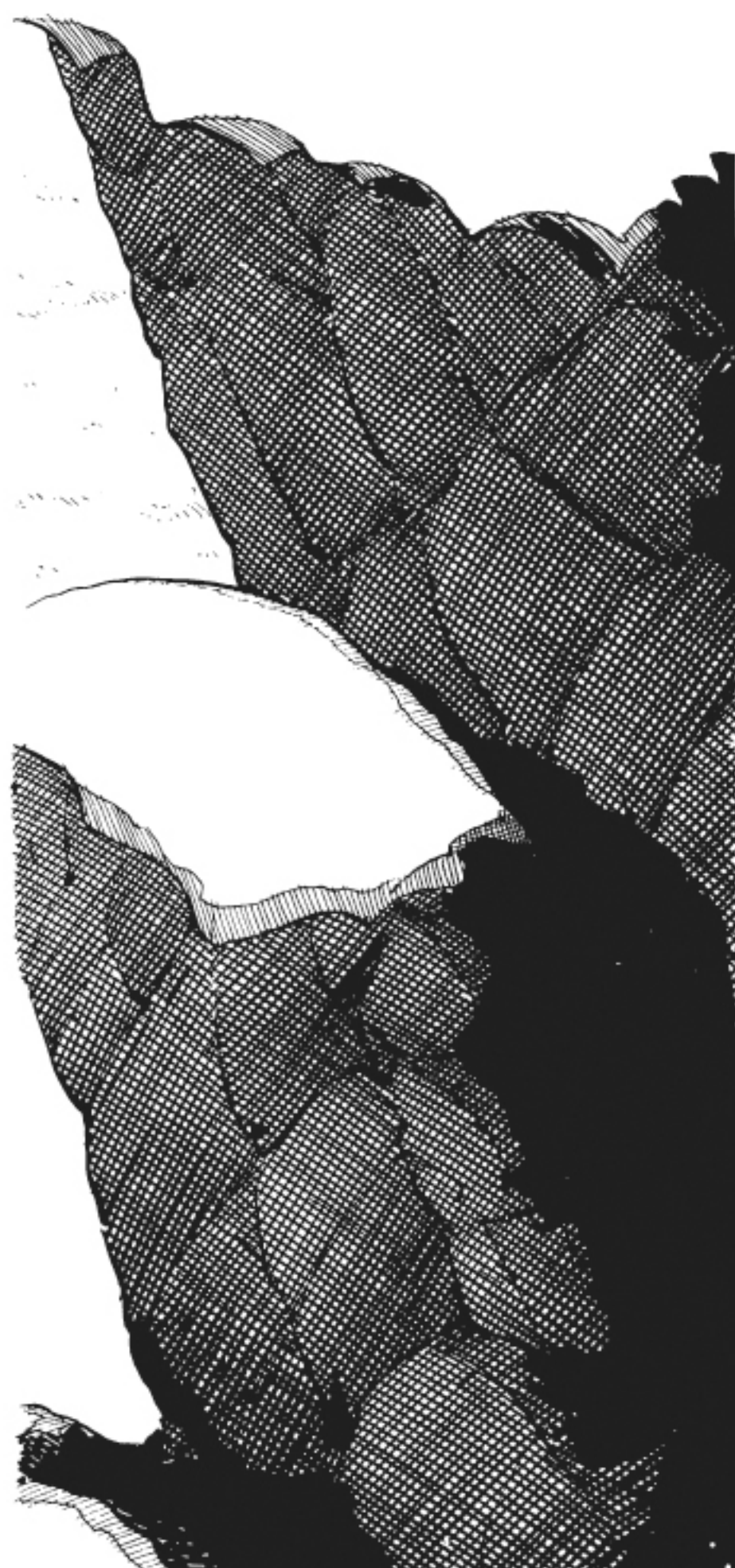
I'LL SEND YOU BACK WHENEVER YOU LIKE, THE LITTLE TAVERN AT THE WALL OF TSI -- JUST BELOW CASTLE WALLIS?

AYE.



CEREBUS WILL BE A LOT BETTER THIS TIME. CEREBUS IS NO SAINT -- BUT YOU'LL SEE, CEREBUS CAN BE VERY NICE WHEN HE WANTS TO BE.

THAT'S VERY TRUE.



NO MORE GETTING A LITTLE BIT WARM AND THEN SNOWING ALL OVER HIMSELF FOR CEREBUS...

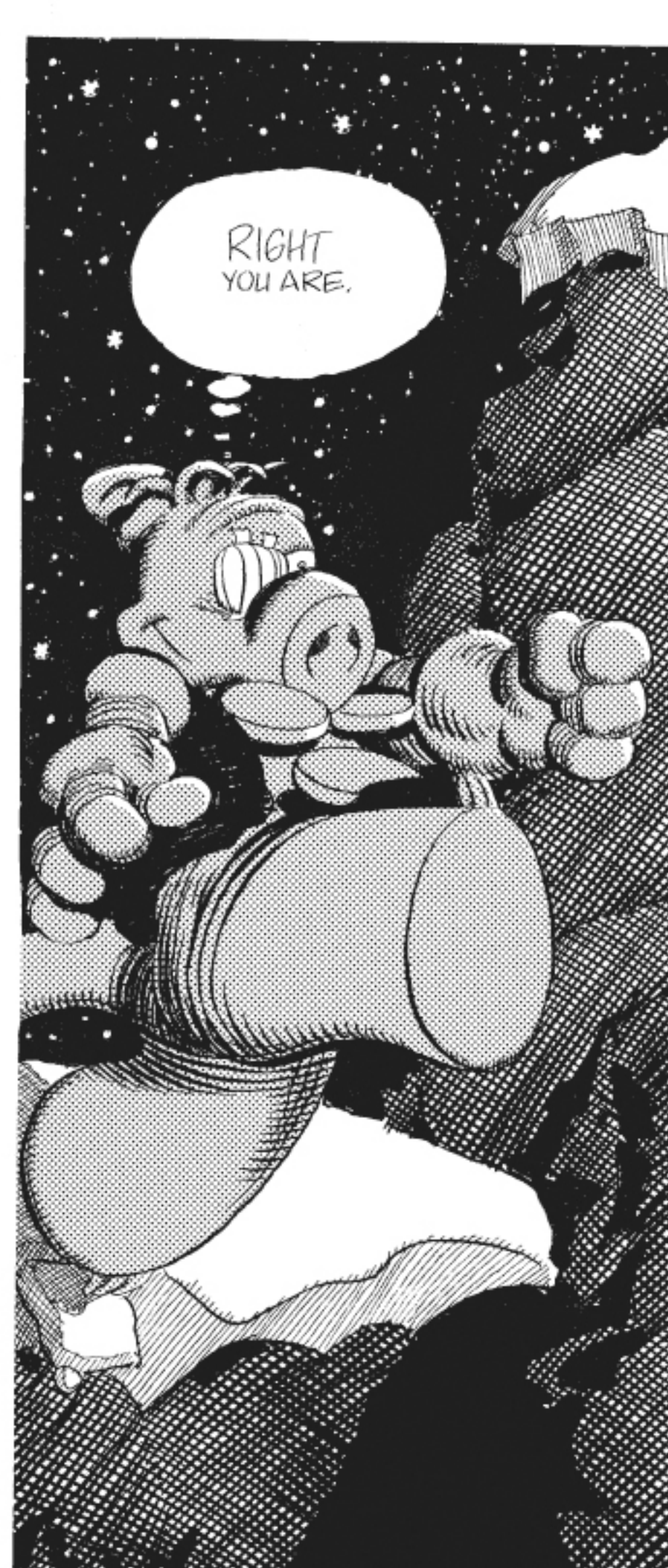
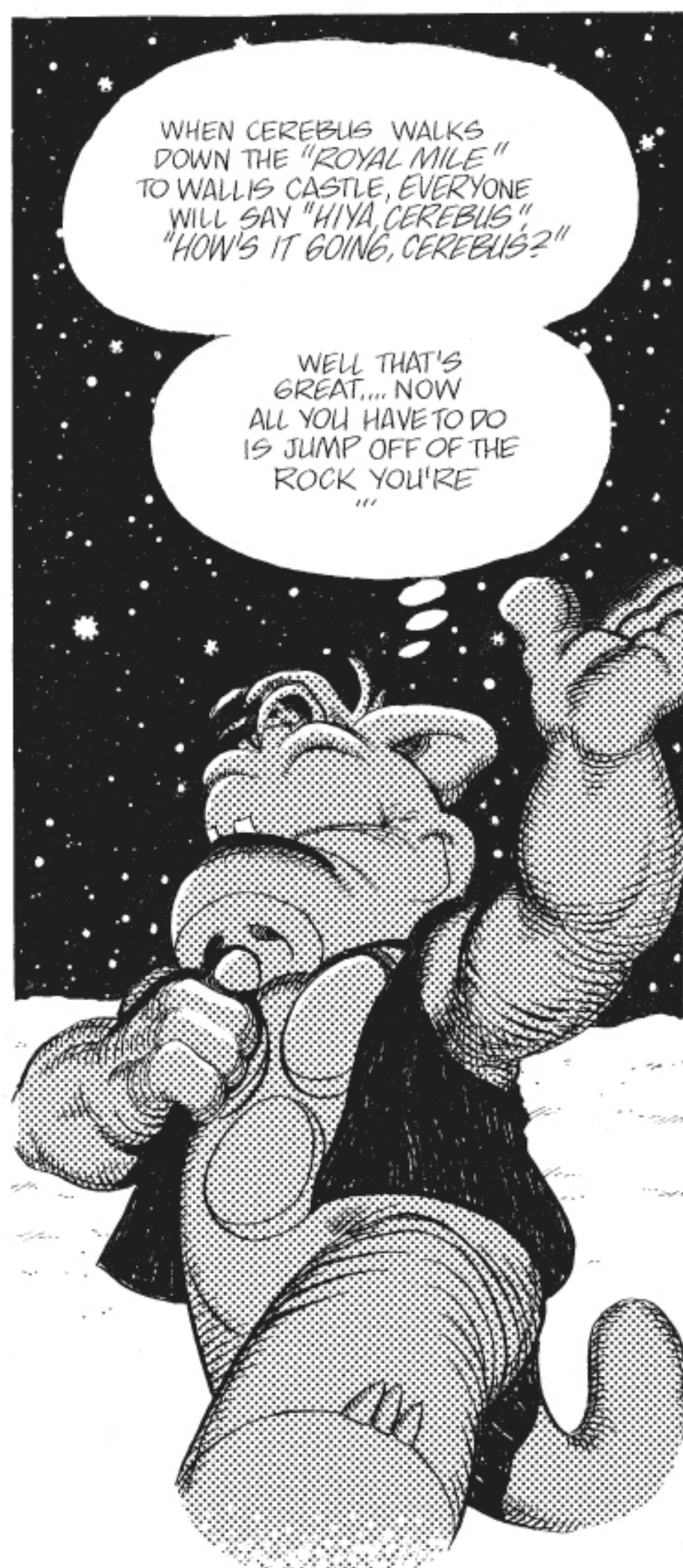
NO SIR, CEREBUS IS GOING TO BE WARM ALL THE TIME.

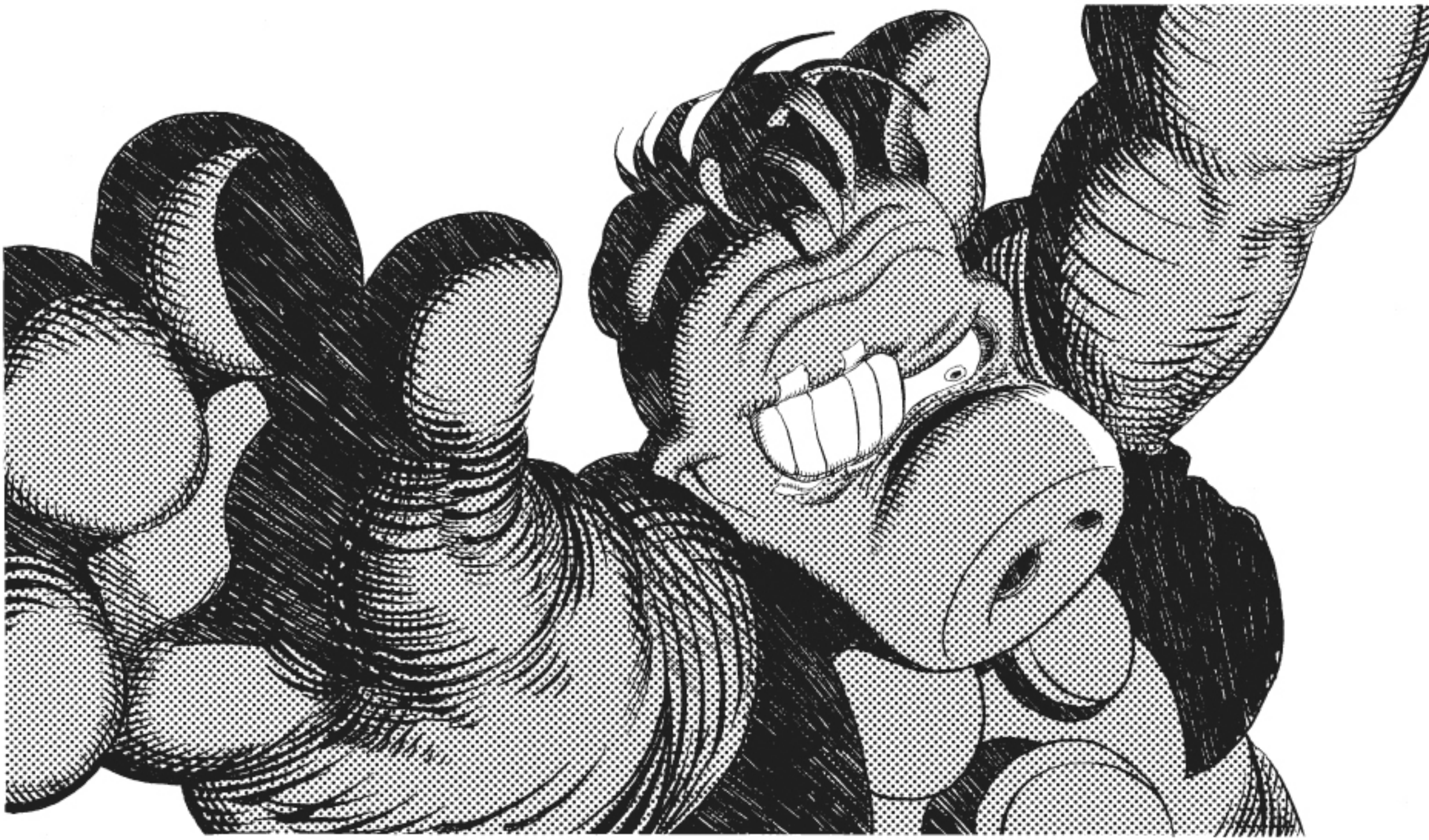


SEE THAT LITTLE GRAY GUY OVER THERE (PEOPLE WILL SAY)? HE'S VERY, VERY WARM.

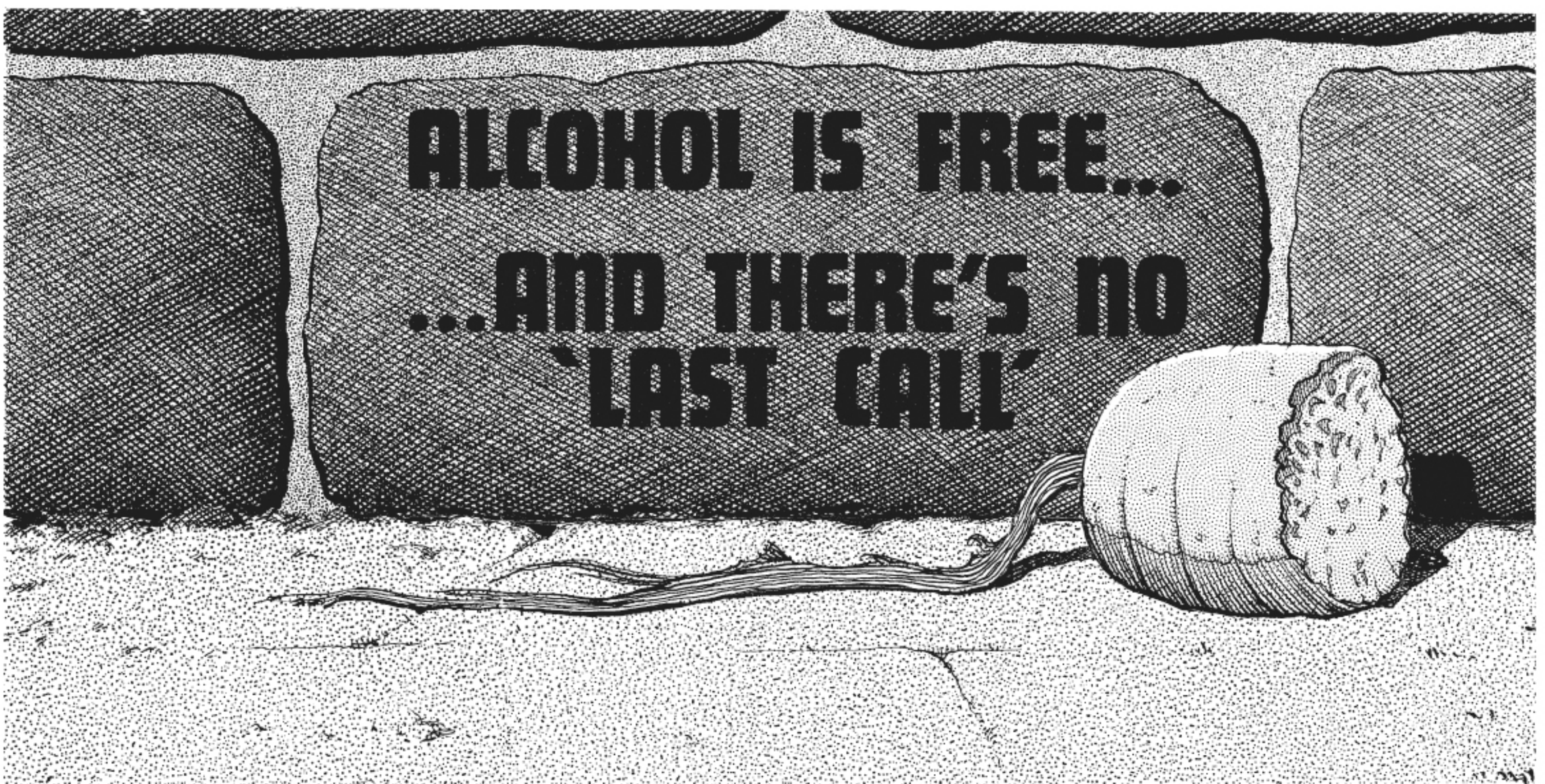
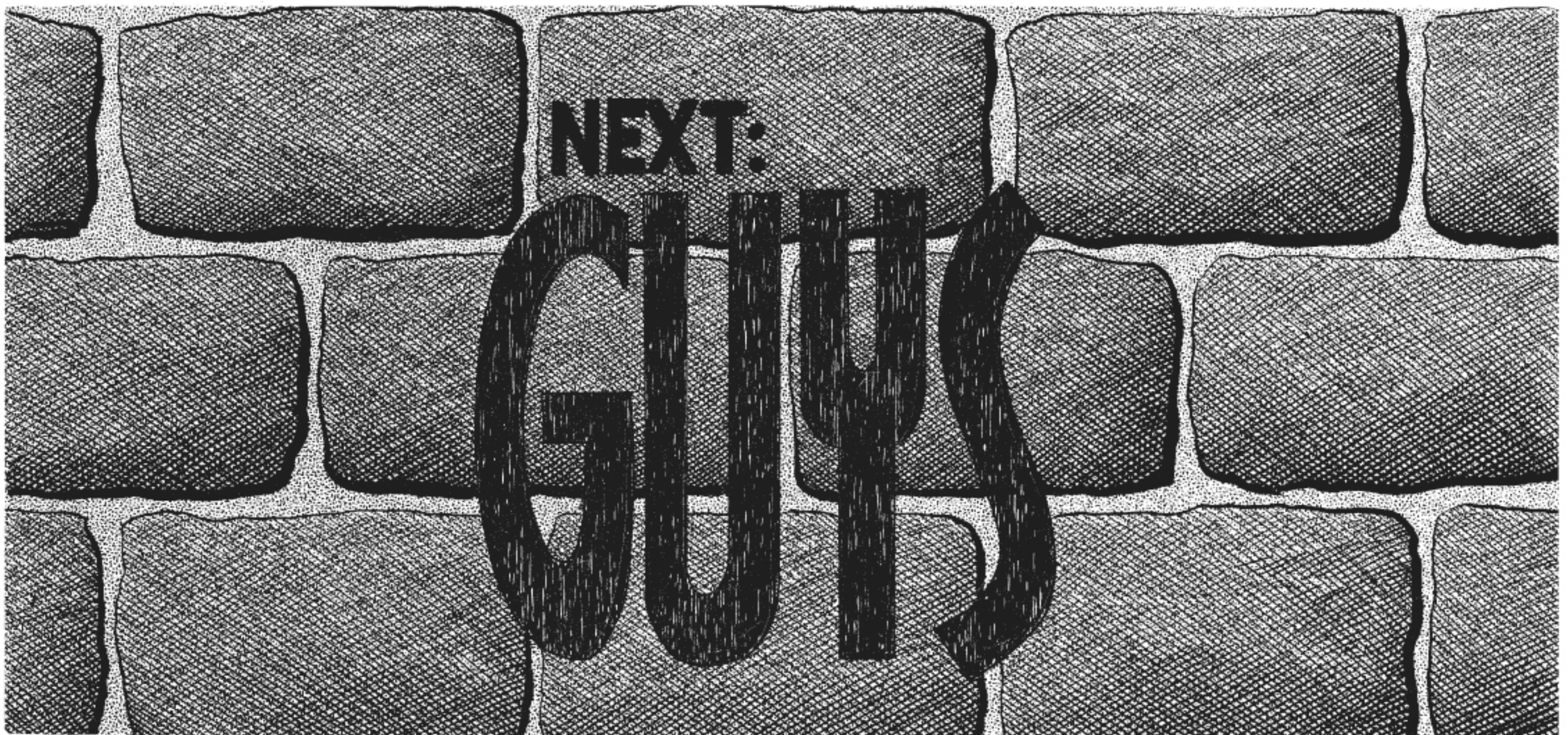
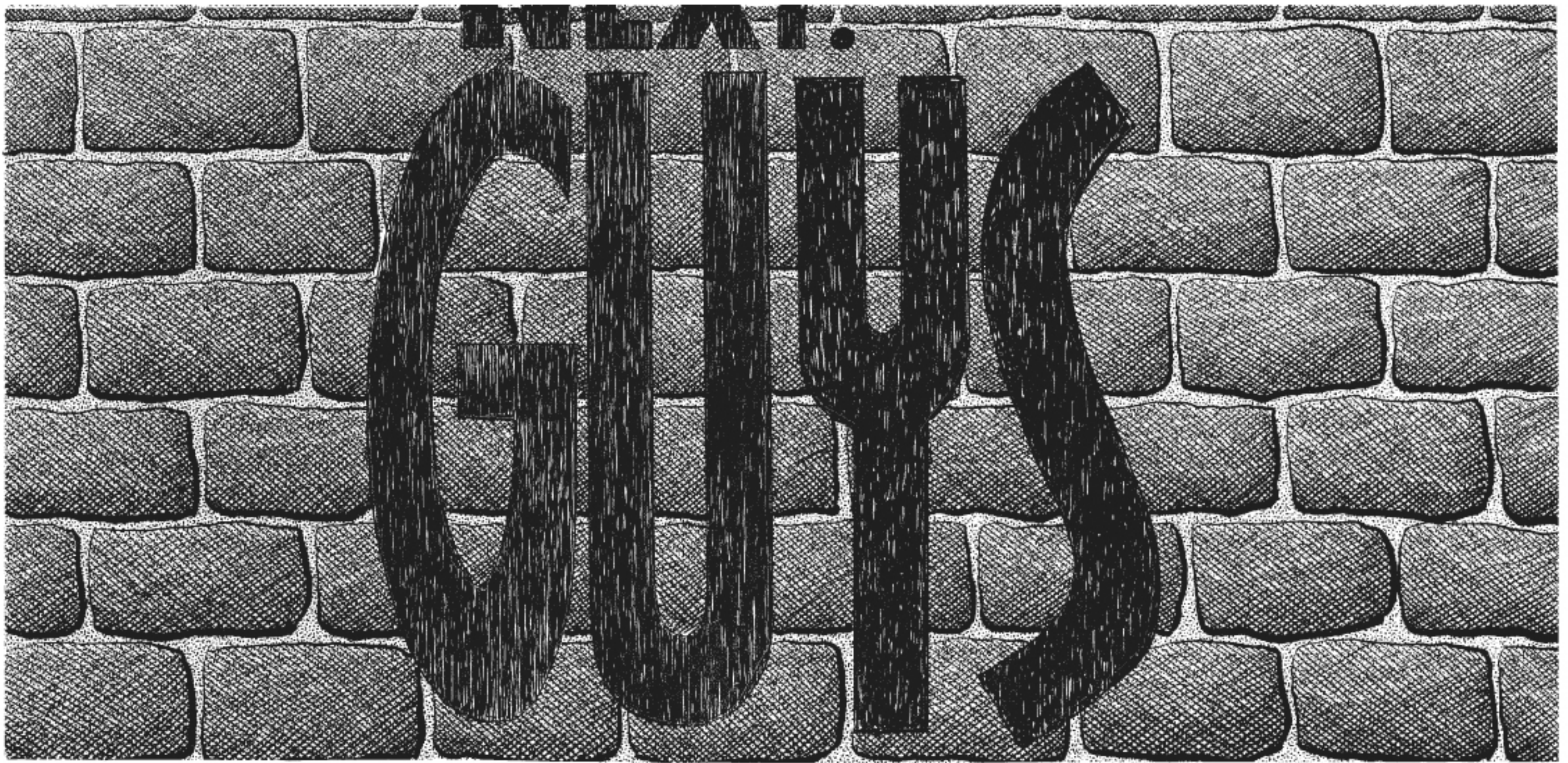
EVERYONE IS GOING TO BE CEREBUS' FRIEND.

EVERYONE.









Digital restoration by Living the Line, San Diego, CA:
Sean Michael Robinson

Original art scanned by Sandeep Atwal and Gerhard
Copy editing by Jeff Seiler

6,000 WORDS ON THE RESTORED *MINDS*

Sean Michael Robinson

Reviewing what I wrote yesterday, I see that I have begun without plan or foresight. and in fact without the least notion of what I was trying to do or why I was trying to do it. That is how I have begun everything in life. Perhaps I need to begin before I can think clearly about the task. The chief thing is to begin, after all—after which the chief thing is to finish. [...]

It is all in the pen case. You have to take out the ink and string it together into the right shapes. That is all.

— Gene Wolfe, *On Blue's Waters*

You hold in your hands a brand-new, restored edition of *Minds*, the tenth volume of *Cerebus the Aardvark*, a 6,000 page series of graphic novels serialized between December 1977 and March 2004. Structurally, the series might be thought of as a *roman fleuve*, the French series novel form characterized by books that can be read independently, but together follow a central character or family or even society through time, each novel potentially illuminating different aspects of the whole. *Minds* is itself a culmination of both the larger novel *Mothers & Daughters*, and in a broader sense, the climax of the first two-thirds of the series.

In the previous volume, *Reads*, the reader was presented with two simultaneous tracks of narrative: in the first track, the rising action of the explicit narrative, the potential climax of the sword-and-sorcery, world-building aspects of the story thus far: the titular character, Cerebus the Aardvark, meeting his adversary Cirin and his mental acquaintance Po for the first time, and finding that they, too, are aardvarks. The result of this conference and final collision? BANG BANG BANG. A series of revelations, followed by a savage slow-motion fight between Cirin and Cerebus that is interrupted only by the destruction of the room that they're in, and the realization that they're taking part in an ascension event, the second in the series, the throne room crumbling around them, and suddenly in orbit.

And on the second track? At first, during the non-violent discussion between the three aardvarks and Astoria, the story of Victor Reid, "reads" author/serial fiction writer, who finds himself beset by commercial success that threatens to upend his life of art. Then BANG BANG BANG. The fight between Cerebus and Cirin flips the second track, transitioning the text pieces from Victor Reid to Viktor Davis, who directly addresses the reader in an all-encompassing descriptive style. Though Reid shared biographical characteristics (and industry gossip) with real-life Sim, it is Davis who seems to be a clearer stand-in for the author. Though Reid's segment was amplified by spot illustrations in the manner of the "reads" that Victor himself authors, the Viktor Davis text pieces are all text, all allusion and accumulation of incident and detail, reliant on an interior manipulation of the reader unique to Davis. As Cerebus and Cirin ascend, and find themselves tiny specs among the terrifyingly large celestial bodies, Viktor Davis arrives at his point. It is the reader who has ascended, who is presented with a complex sex-based explanation of the Big Bang and the origin of the universe, an explanation

in direct opposition to the one presented by The Judge to Cerebus at the point of the previous ascension.

Which brings us to *Minds*. From the first page, the twin tracks of *Reads* have converged, though that fact might be unclear to an inattentive reader, or a reader unfamiliar with the physical appearance of author Dave Sim circa 1994. An almost featureless figure appears in partial silhouette against a backdrop of stars, a single earring glinting, a forelock of hair unruly and tousled. This figure, the second physical manifestation of the author to appear in the series after a brief visual appearance in *Reads*, is either the last ripple of Viktor Davis, or the first hint of the "Dave" who will arrive in the book very soon; or both, a one-page bridge linking the two books together through careful sequencing.

Yes, as you most likely already know, Dave Sim is a character in *Minds*. (and if you *don't* already know that, why exactly are you reading this essay before you read the actual book?) It's a shocking sequence on several levels, a remarkably bold and inventive way of forcing self-examination on a character who has been, throughout, both impulsive and consistently self-serving. For 4,000 or so pages of life, Cerebus has been a rogue, a loveable murderer, a likeable blackguard, one of the most selfish and egocentric characters in literature. In a complex interrogation of his creation, "Dave" and Cerebus engage in a dialogue in which Cerebus is lectured about his history, his faults and flaws, his character, the wrong-ness he brings into the lives of others, and what, if anything, he can do to set himself right.

In the context of the full series, it's a gambit that pays off tremendously, sealing up the metaphysical fissure created by the events of *Reads*, wrapping up the loose ends and mysteries of the early parts of the series, and setting the stages for the last third of the overall series, in which the "outer" parts of the monthly book (the letters column, the editorials, the covers, even the advertisements and footnotes) have merged with the "inner" portions, sometimes literally. If the first two-thirds of *Cerebus* could conceivably read as a sword-and-sorcery novel—albeit an incredibly complex and pastiche-laden one—like the *Riverworld* series crossed with *Les Misérables*; and the latter third a genre-less melange, alternately literary biography, religious exegesis, and situation comedy, then *Minds* is the Colossus of Rhodes, one foot astride each shore.

Let's talk about that central conceit, the interrogation of creation by creator. It's a brilliant move in a series full of abrupt left-turns. Although this sort of metafictional conceit has become more common in both comics and film in the past few decades, such a move was exceedingly rare in 1994, and even more so in the late 70s, which is when, Sim informs us in the introduction to the book, he first conceived of the idea.

But if you accept, as I do, that *Cerebus* is one of the most completely-crafted works of pastiche ever created, Max Ernst's *La femme 100 têtes* and *Loony Tunes* in a blender and then constructed with the sensibilities of Dickens and Will Eisner, then it stands to reason that somewhere there's an antecedent or even inspiration for this linchpin sequence. (Aside, that is, from the one alluded to by Sim's dedication.)

"Relax," I keep telling myself. "Ease up. Calm down. Cool off. Untense. Hang loose, effendi/pilgrim/true believer. They will understand. Just explain it to them. Candidly, but with dignity. They'll agree—it's better than going to reprint."

It is? A comic book without panels, balloons, or even a plot?

An essay, for crying out loud?!

— Steve Gerber, *Howard the Duck* #16 (September 1977)

Like *Cerebus*, *Howard the Duck* was born of pastiche, and yet was a complete original from the beginning, with an instantly familiar personality and speech patterns. Created by writer Steve Gerber and artist Val Mayerik, *Howard* first appeared in the Marvel Comics horror line, as part of the *Adventure into Fear* "Man-Thing" backup feature. His subsequent growth in popularity propelled *Howard* into a few issues of *Giant-Sized Man-Thing* and, finally, his own monthly book, debuting in 1976. Initially represented as a cynical, cigar-smoking Donald Duck type, *Howard* was a fowl in a world full of humans, a visual outsider in his own comic, which was peopled by parodies of popular comics of the day and laced with pop-culture take-downs.

Despite being co-created by and written exclusively by Gerber, *Howard the Duck* was owned lock stock and barrel by Marvel Comics, i.e. Cadence Industries, under what the comic industry euphemistically calls a "work-for-hire" arrangement. More on this momentarily.

There are more than a few commonalities between *Howard* and the early issues of *Cerebus*, strong enough comparisons that early *Cerebus* has been referred to as *Howard the Duck* crossed with Barry Windsor-Smith's *Conan the Barbarian*. But as an influence on later *Cerebus*, as late as *Minds*? Really?

Howard the Duck issue 16, written and edited by Steve Gerber, was published by Marvel Comics in September of 1977, two months before the first-issue debut of *Cerebus the Aardvark*. The cover features *Howard* and Beverly, the series regulars, cowering on a giant typewriter and menaced by clawed hands, and sports the tagline, "Howard at the Mercy of His Most Powerful Foe—THE INCREDIBLE CREATOR!" Under the covers, it's a radical departure from the series, and quite the experiment for what was ostensibly a super-hero book.

The comic is presented in its entirety as a series of splash pages, seemingly drawn by whomever was around the Marvel offices the afternoon the script for the issue arrived. The text itself is a series of micro-essays, addressed to the plight of the writer under deadline. As the comic continues, Gerber's monologue morphs into a script-style dialogue with his own creation, *Howard*'s interjections providing both amplification and a wicked undercutting of Gerber's expressed sentiments.

"You know what Gerbs? Deep down, I've always suspected you don't know as much as yer stories would infer. You've learned how ta manipulate words an' pictures ta give a semblance of profundity, but it's all superficial! Cosmetic surgery performed on creaky old ideas an' thoughts! Whaddaya say ta that?!"

"I'd say that, uhm on occasion I've harbored similar suspicions, Howard."

The remainder of the issue addresses itself to the ludicrous conventions of pamphlet comics. A double-page spread features a mandated perfunctory fight scene featuring an Ostrich and Las Vegas chorus girl fighting a table lamp. The climax involves Gerber whipping up an inane domestic narrative involving an atomic bomb, followed by *Howard* as a college professor forcing his students to analyze the story, then *Howard* carried off by said enraged students. The issue concludes with a one-page "fan letter" from Steve Gerber himself, "enumerating the high points of the ish" and ultimately deciding, "Wish I could have been more laudatory, but I guess the old maxim holds true: a fill-in issue is a fill-in issue is a fill-in issue."

Here we have, under a single flimsy cover, the metafictional aspects of *Reads* and *Minds* in miniature, all of the seedlings of a dozen innovations of form that Sim would later nurture, and explode, using his broader canvas and finely-honed abilities and *complete editorial freedom* to transform them radically, to add them to the whole, where they would speak to and amplify each other.

As for Steve Gerber, well, it was Dave Sim who formulated the concept most succinctly. "No corporation will ever pay you enough to successfully sue them."

More on this in a bit.

In the outro to the restored *Reads*, I wrote extensively about the problems inherent in discussing a heavily-metafictional, serialized work of art through the funnel of a trade collection. Much of what made the monthly serialization what it was—the surrounding tissue of covers, essays, letters, responses, advertisements, previews of other books, etc etc etc—are all absent from the equation, trimmed away and discarded, the twenty pages of story surgically removed from its original context and presented back-to-back under a single cover. For many of the novels this is undoubtedly the superior form, the new shape providing a seamless reading experience that reveals the overall form of the thing. But in a way, both *Reads* and *Minds* suffer from that seamless presentation, as they both address themselves to the reader (on many levels) in a way that invites comparison to the surrounding material.

Three months into *Minds*, issue 189, the letters column is

occupied entirely by (mostly) negative responses to the conclusion to *Reads*. The letters are presented without any direct responses, but are wrapped up/surrounded by a lengthy summation and reflection in the voice of Viktor Davis, the writer/narrator of the latter part of *Reads*.

For the most part, the letters excoriate Sim (most correspondents ignoring the “Viktor Davis” conceit of the actual text) for a wide variety of sins, including: fallacious reasoning; using too many words (“Hey shithead... If I wanted to read *text*, I would be buying paperbacks... not comic books!”); for failing to entertain them.

Three of the more significant responses:

Mark Haden Frazer of Wisconsin writes a lengthy defense of relationships and “Merged Permanences”, suggesting that Sim lacks the emotional maturity to take sexual relationships to the next level. He then ends his letter with “*Two*: In your defense, I must admit that every single woman I’ve ever known, slept with and/or been close to, EVERY SINGLE ONE [...] whenever the conversation turns to art, politics, psychology or religion, the woman in question will almost ALWAYS arch her back, make a mock pout, perhaps even playfully hit me on the shoulder, and say “You *think* too much!” As if that were a bad thing. Draw your own conclusions, kids.”

Texas retailer and science-fiction writer Buddy Saunders takes issue with the *Reads* characterization of family as the enemy of art, and wraps up his lengthy letter with this—

“Dave, over the years you have made me very angry, have puzzled me, have entertained me, shared common ground with me, and always impressed me with your honesty and sincerity. You say what you think, a rare and admirable trait in a world full of sheep and empty faces.”

Sook-Yin Lee, who would rise to fame a decade later as an actress and CBC radio hostess, writes—

“Your comic is a disappointment. The 186th issue reveals *Cerebus* as the *Mein Kampf* of comics. Fear and hatred of women motivate your disturbed and misguided argument of the “Female Emotional Void and the Rational Male Light.” Shame on you for turning out to be another fanatical, mean-spirited misogynist.” (The issue had a different effect on her then-boyfriend, cartoonist Chester Brown, who later wrote that the issue “got me questioning romantic love.”)

The Sim response, in the voice of *Reads* narrator Viktor Davis, titled “Pilgrimage to Provincetown,” wraps around the letters, a single narrow column on either side of the page, in tiny bolded type as customary for Sim’s letter page responses. The essay invokes amputation and birth, Napoleon and Hemingway, *The White Goddess* and *From Hell*. It’s a remarkable piece of writing, as tangled and reference-laden as the conclusion of *Reads*, and provides a suitable let-down from that peak. “He resided in a post-186 world, an exile (perhaps this is excessive except at the individual level), his Elba comfortable and suited to his purposes. For his new work supplants old. He is renewed. The thing had been assembled, piece by piece, until at last it was done. It existed, was functional. He had set its timer for September. The twenty thousand marched in lock-step to the point of ground zero.”

I provide this summary here because this is, to me, the fascinating context of the serialized form of *Minds*. In the brief period between the serialization of *Women* and the beginning of *Minds*, Dave Sim and *Cerebus* had gone from critical (if not always commercial) darlings to...well, the status was uncertain. Lifted by the long-term acendence of quality of the book, the continual accumulation of readers, buoyed by periodic injections of new fans from high-profile mainstream cross-overs (most recently, the Sim-written *Spawn* #10, May 1993, which blew away many an adolescent mind, mine included), *Cerebus* seemed to be riding a wave that would never peak, a relentless rise of circulation and steadily-increasing acclaim. But all waves crest.

Whether related or unrelated to the storm on the horizon, this is one of the most fertile and versatile periods of Sim’s non-fiction writing. Having used the past several years’ worth of editorials to advance the position of self-publishing, to make every stage of cartooning and publication easier for an audience eager to take up a brush and an adding machine for themselves, the editorials in *Minds* focus extensively on developing a loose confederation of self-publishers that see ownership, stewardship and development of their own work as a moral right, as a crusade, as permanently bound to the work itself.

Under the heading “THE BIG PICTURE,” in a military stencil typeface, a series of editorials begin. “SPIRITS OF INDEPENDENCE is not an aesthetic or philosophical movement—it is essentially an act of war declared upon the comic-book status quo, hence the changes in the format of *Cerebus* for the duration of 1995. Welcome to the War Room.”

Self-publishing is a guerrilla struggle against the forces allied in opposition to self-ownership, whether they be structural barriers unique to the industry, related to the difficulties of distribution or navigating the cash-flow rip-currents inherent in publishing, or even barriers of life-style. And each editorial, speech, and open letter addresses the ways in which these issue are linked to each other.

From Issue 187 (October 1994), the first issue of *Minds*: “When ALF first came out, I had a number of people advocating that I take some sort of legal action. There *were* similarities, but the two things are so widely different that any suit I would bring would be of the nuisance variety—a parasite looking for a payoff. In a karmic sense, someone who has a character that looks like Groucho Marx and who makes free use of any “Roach Fodder” he finds lying around would only be asking for trouble. Glass houses and all that. Don’t sign any contracts and be productive and all legal vulnerabilities become a moot point. That’s my personal bottom line.”

From the same issue: “Zoning requirements (i.e., not conducting business in a residential area) usually only apply to “walk-in” trade, so don’t let that stop you from going in and finding out what the local rules are. They aren’t going to tell you you can’t write and draw in your own home (unless your name is Michael Diana and you’re living in the People’s Republic of Florida).”

Two issues later: “Bottom line: reinvest all revenues in keeping your work in print and eat a lot of macaroni and cheese until you’re SURE there’s enough in your account to cover any emergency reprinting.”

Perhaps most significant to other self-published cartoonists: the endless material support provided by *Cerebus* as a venue: plugs in the letters column. Plugs in tour posters and ads and covers. And the new *Cerebus Preview* feature, providing first looks at self-published works by the leading lights of independent cartooning. John Mitchell and Jana Christy's *Very Vicky*. Paul Pope's *THB*. Jason Lutes' *Jar of Fools*. Eddie Campbell's *Bacchus*. Charles Vess' *Book of Ballads and Sagas*. And many more.

The letters page continued including Sim's extensive and sometimes entertaining joustings with his public. From the Aardvark Comment section of issue 190, to an artist who just received his first rejection from a corporate comic brand: "Ian. Don't be such a putz. Getting rejected by DC is a badge of honour. Wear it proudly, man."

Issue 191 (February 1995): "As to your P.P.S. Vanaheim is sort of Estarcion's version of heaven or Valhalla, where good and dutiful Tarimites go when they die. In a more peculiar sense it is very much an allegory of self-publishing, i.e., a place for those who don't fit in anywhere else to go, a kind of safe haven for those who don't fit neatly into the widely accepted categories ready to hand. So far, so good."

Issue 193 (April 1995): "Thank you for taking the time to type out so many pages of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. It's an interesting batch of opinions which I found, at various points, willfully ignorant, self-evident and not applicable. I'm glad it 'hits a gong' with you. It doesn't with me. Except where it does."

Issue 195 (June 1995), regarding *From Hell* delays: "Hey, me too. I also can't wait to find out whom Disney hires to do the comics adaptation of the movie now that Alan and Eddie have sold all their rights to it."

And the fallout from *Reads* continues, including an illuminating back and forth with J. Hagey, inquiring for *The Comics Journal*, Sim's long-time sparring partners and occasional allies. Batting away the shallow inquiries from Hagey, Sim points out that "*Reads* is the third part of the four-part *Mothers and Daughters* novel. The reaction to issue 186 is a tempest in a teapot focusing on twenty pages of creative work one thousand pages in length, which is, in its turn, one sixth of the larger twenty-six-year project. This large project is of minimal interest to a minimal number of people in the comic-book field, itself the smallest medium of communication in the field of arts and/or entertainment. Until someone else is able to produce a work of comparable complexity and size, I fail to see why I should give any credence whatsoever to those who disapprove of me and my work."

Hagey's reply prompts a longer reply from Sim which comes as close to a mission statement as he would ever commit to paper, as revealing as it is important, one of the most interesting peeks available into Sim's creative process and his philosophy of art at the time.

"Very real possibility that this exchange might prove to be the last word on *Reads*, which would be something of a relief since the issues require contention to be brought into sharper focus and most of the communication I've had has run roughshod over my overarching thesis (something I am

well used to and which is now more a source of amusement than frustration)." [...]

"*Cerebus* is not a body of work. *Cerebus* is a work. It is not *the Collected Works of Charles Dickens*, it is *A Tale of Two Cities*. There is a viewpoint that is being advanced in the work. If I could make my point in some condensed form - a magazine interview or a distillation volume - I would scarcely have devoted seventeen years of my life (and nine more to go) to pumping the simpler view full of hot air to create the illusion of mass.

"You can mention the names that you have as 'inspirations' for my work. This is an error of scholarship—the assumption that others' ideas are the building blocks from which a creative work is constructed." [...]

"I have only infrequently read anything about myself or *Cerebus* that has anything to do with the work I am writing. Scholarship about creativity is important only to scholars. Analysis is important only to analysts. Criticism is important only to critics. You attempt to label and classify that which is important because it cannot be successfully labeled and cannot be successfully classified. [...] reading between the lines [...], the only conclusion you can come to is that the only logical reason to create anything these days is to keep the pocketbook happy. A happy pocketbook is an implication of creativity having little or (in my case) nothing to do with what I do and why I do it. I am pointing at something you are evidently unable to see. This does not make me uncomfortable. You are asking me to play football on an ice rink. You don't play football on an ice rink. You play hockey on an ice rink. You play football on a football field. The fact that football would be an entirely different and largely inadequate game when played on an ice rink does not accurately reflect any fundamental flaw in the game of football. I am sure your ice rink is good for something, if only the personal satisfaction you derive from it. I think you would be well served to content yourself with that.

"I hope this brings you a little closer to understanding."

A little closer to understanding.

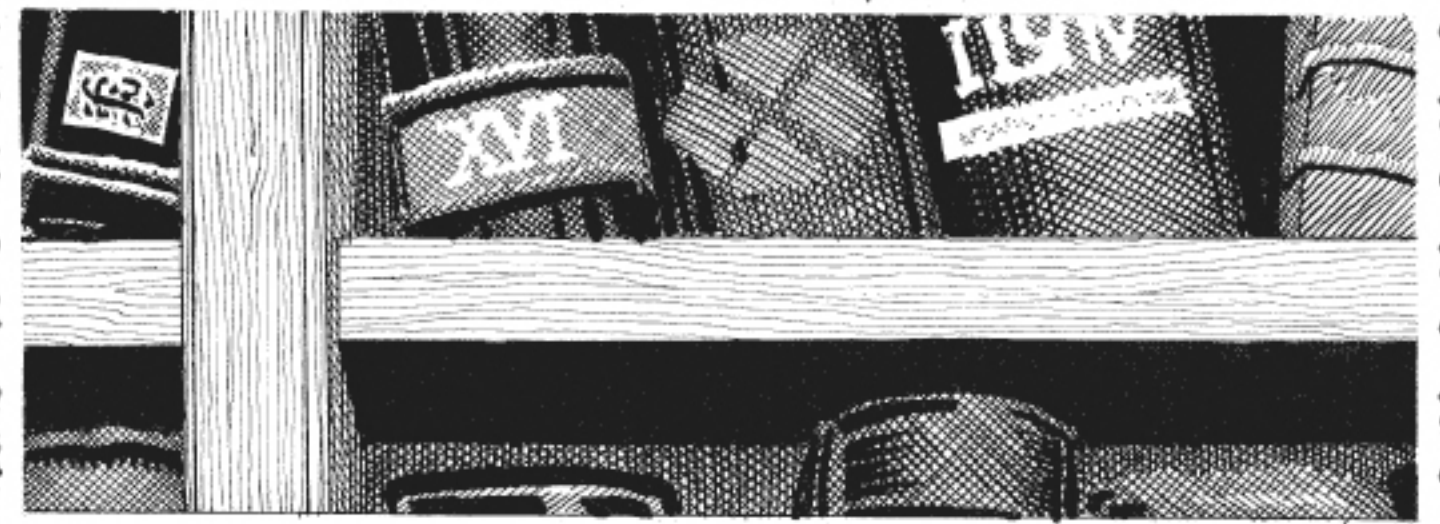
This principle applies to most varieties of human beings. If other people would accord them as much consideration as they do their plants, they too would bloom. Of course, plants don't talk back, which makes them much less annoying to have around the house. This may or may not explain why so many of our institutions seem to devote themselves to the task of turning people into vegetables rather than treating them with the same kindness we lavish upon the already mute. We tend to prefer stumps over trees. You can sit on a stump." [...]

Characters who cannot change as rapidly, as often, as materially as I do anesthetize me. Characters can become institutions devoted to making vegetables out of writers.

Howard looks up again, raises an eyebrow. "Not bad. You may continue."

Thank you your honor.

—Steve Gerber, *Howard the Duck* #16 (September 1977)



above left: page 140 (detail), as it appeared in the third printing of Minds
 above right: the same panel, scanned and restored directly from the original art board

When Steve Gerber created Howard, he was working as a freelance writer, scraping by on an array of writing assignments. Howard's appearance seemed an afterthought, a few panels, a throwaway. But a creator doesn't always know what he has created. Letters demanded more. Fans demanded more. Howard's seemingly inexplicable success took everyone by surprise, and Marvel authorized special perks for their favored freelancer, including permission for certain licensing items (most notably, a "VOTE HOWARD THE DUCK IN '76" button featuring a Bernie Wrightson-drawn Howard.) Meanwhile, Gerber continued to sign his checks, each stamped with a legend below the signature area acknowledging the work-for-hire nature of the work.

It has to be said that Gerber himself was less than charitable to the artists who labored to change his words, his scripts, into comics. Frank Brunner, who was the penciller of the first issue of *Howard*, thought that his contributions warranted a co-writer credit, instead of the co-plotter credit he received. He was also irritated by Gerber taking a share of the original artwork, allowed by Marvel but in practice, waived by many other writers. He also found it difficult to pace and shape a book in which the writer delivered the script just a few pages at a time.

Brunner went it alone after issue two, working up a very, let us say Howard-influenced, mail-order print, and a feature called "the Duckaneer" for the very first issue of Star*Reach's *Quack!* (July 1976): strangely enough, a future freelance home to one Dave Sim, who contributed a cover to the third issue, and several stories featuring "The Beavers", his creations, of which he retained ownership.

In October of 1977, after completing a freelance job for Marvel rivals DC Comics, Steve Gerber became a salaried employee of Marvel Comics, signing a contract that required he write 52 monthly comics per year, and edit an additional twelve. In addition, the contract spelled out special perks relating to the licensing of *Howard the Duck* into other media. Unfortunately for Gerber, what the contract didn't make explicit was whether these perks would terminate with the contract itself.

Six months later, Gerber would find out when he was fired, ostensibly for continuous late delivery of scripts.

Steve Gerber spent the next few years embroiled in a legal battle with Marvel over the rights to the character he had co-created, incurring more than \$100,000 of legal debt that would follow him for the rest of his life. The lawsuit eventually ended in a settlement, the terms of which are still unknown, but it certainly did not leave Gerber in the black. Despite Gerber's efforts, lightning did not strike twice, and he was unable to replicate the success of Howard in any significant way. Aside from a few exceptions (including notable attempts to return to Howard), Gerber spent the rest of his days as a writer and story editor on various children's animation projects.

I now find myself nearing the end of this essay having spent the majority of the allotted space on *Howard the Duck*, on letters columns and essays, including a vociferous argument against the practice of criticism—and very little on the actual character and substance of the work itself. And maybe that's fitting for a book like *Minds*,

that suggests so much but insists on so little. It's a work of contradictions. *Sui generis* but like the rest of the series, indebted to a complex web of borrowings. Received by so many readers as an emotional, even devastating, book, but written and drawn as an intellectual exercise by its author.

And maybe there isn't much point in dissection in the first place, and providing context and background is more than enough. There's a certain kind of work that rewards individual analysis with a deeper mystery rather than an explicated one. Though a powerful intelligence moves beneath the surface, the whole remains beyond the grasp.

One would think a work in which the author becomes a character, and, in the previous book, a stand-in for the author expressing strong opinions, would necessarily be didactic in nature. But, although Sim would create overtly didactic works later (*Judenhass* being a notable example), and though many later portions of *Cerebus* would qualify, I think it would be difficult to rationally sustain an argument for the work as a whole. Even in *Minds*, although "Dave" is capable of changing Cerebus' world and physical environment, and knows the entirety of the history of his characters and can interact with them as he chooses, there's no pretense of omniscience or omnipotence. One might look at the sequence between Cerebus and an ever-changing Jaka, each permutation of their relationship more disastrous than the previous, as fatalist in nature, like an enactment of the modern "scorpion and the frog" parable. Quite to the contrary, the spirit of the "inner" *Minds* as well as the "outer" is one of self-determination, self-actualization. Cerebus is a bad person because he does bad things. It is his deeds, not his nature, that makes it so, and if he wants change, that change will be on him alone.

From page 127 of *Minds*:

Dave: See – the problem with your "Baker and bread" analogy is that I'm not the baker and you're not the bread. You're the baker and your life is the bread.

Cerebus: Tarim?

Dave: >sigh< I know you must get tired of hearing this, but – no. I'm not Tarim. I AM your creator – but given that no creator knows where his ideas come from, even that's a shaky premise. Maybe I'm someone's creation as you're MY creation... maybe MY creator has no idea where I came from. Or maybe. Maybe he's just a voice in my head.

This is where the inner and outer merge, how to make sense of the conflicting strands of *Mothers and Daughters*: to begin to back up far enough to see the tapestry that they create together. Men and women. Choice above all versus protection of the young. Corporations versus individual expression. Bloody freedom versus a comfortable slavery. Merged Permanence and the seminal light of creation. Self-publishing isn't just a practical decision. For an artist who wants to express it all, everything of which he's capable, it's a moral imperative.

(It's quite the irony that this goal would eventually be realized through the worldwide interconnection possible with the Internet, a military computer project turned outrage-machine that has resulted in increasing polarization and political entrenchment. It is 2017, and

you can publish whatever you want for whatever sliver of an audience you're capable of reaching. And those who disagree with you are capable of social shaming on a scale never before imagined. It's quite the world!)

Sometimes a dream is what makes you a slave.

—Liz Phair, "Slave"

How much freedom do I have here? Can I make any comparison I'd like, however tangential it may seem?

Exile in Guyville was the debut album of singer/songwriter/guitarist Liz Phair. It was released June of 1993, a month after the Sim-written *Spawn #10*, the allegorical story that grapples with self-publishing and self-determination on a god-like scale.

Exile in Guyville is an incredible debut. From a songwriting perspective, it's one of the best albums of the past decades, the work of an incredible personality and thinker making the most of the limited tools at her disposal—her choppy electric guitar playing, her deadpan, vibrato-less voice, whatever random men she has found to beat some drums and thud some bass along with her in the studio. Liz Phair takes these raw materials, and she shapes them into something new, something that at a distance might resemble the songs of other, lesser humans, but up close shows evidence of some unique form, of new thoughts and intimacies, of new ways of writing and singing.

You might be forgiven for seeing little connection between *Exile* and *Mothers and Daughters*. Upon release, in some quarters the album seemed to almost be regarded as a tract, the "dirty" language and subject matter suggesting a feminist manifest of sorts. But, as with *Cerebus*, digging just a bit beneath the surface, and paying attention to the complex ways in which the formal units interact with each other, suggests something much less orthodox. In commonality with *Mothers and Daughters*, Phair's songs present a world of the sexes in opposition, if not outright war, where modern forms of intimacy have left both sides of the battle deeply dissatisfied.

This conflict is found most directly in the buoyant, frank "Fuck and Run," which features the following refrain:

*"And whatever happened to a boyfriend,
The kind of guy who tries to win you over?
And whatever happened to a boyfriend
The kind of guy who makes love 'cause he's in it?
And I want a boyfriend, I want a boyfriend
I want all that stupid old shit like letters and sodas"*

Interestingly, *Exile in Guyville* wasn't really Phair's debut at all. That distinction would belong to a series of tapes written and recorded by Phair in 1991. Phair sent the results to friends, and copies of copies soon flooded the mail-based tape-trading networks. The forty songs that make up these so-called "Girlysound" tapes are even wilder than *Exile in Guyville*, and serve as the basis of many of *Guyville*'s best songs. What's not present? The half-dozen songs that blithely lift melodies or lyrics wholesale for their own purposes, from sources as diverse as Johnny Cash, the Troggs' "Wild Thing," and Sex Pistols manipulator/manager Malcom McLaren. The songs that

make perverse use of registered trademarks ("Batmobile", and "Speedracer!"). Songs that dealt in subject matter not likely to ingratiate themselves with mainstream America ("Black Market White Baby Dealer", "Six-Dicked Pimp"). In short, everything that a record company wouldn't touch.

Though Phair's *Exile* follow-up, the equally Girlysound-reliant *whip-smart* (February 1994), is just as strong as her debut, her later albums suffer from an escalation of intervention from her record companies, as the indie-label Matador she was previously signed to was merged with mega-label Capitol Records. Her gentler third album was initially rejected by the label, which instructed Phair to "write two hits". hilariously, the CEO of her label denied the charge while confirming it in the most telling way possible. "We sat down with Liz and said, 'Listen, is this everything you want it to be? Because we aren't sure it is what we were hoping it would be.' And together we made the decision to work on it more." For her fourth album, the demands increased: this time the label insisted on co-writers/producers of teen pop dreck, completely unsympathetic (and unflattering) to Phair's aesthetics. When Phair would finally return to her earlier, "let's see what happens" roots in 2010, critics lined up to write about her disapprovingly, or to discredit (or even take credit for!) her earlier work. Liz Phair had committed a series of sins, that all added up to one—violating the orthodoxies of her audience(s).

(Why exactly have I written this much without addressing the superlative work of background artist/cover colorist/designer Gerhard? All-important and all important, but sometimes what a thing *is* takes precedence over how it presents itself, however attractive that presentation. Which I think is the case here: like the later volume *Going Home*, whose barge scenes brought out some inspired work from sailing enthusiast Gerhard, the lovingly-rendered flybys of various planetary bodies in *Minds* are some of the visual highlights of the entire series. Gerhard was a space enthusiast at a young age, and his interest is palpable. The incredible work ethics of both Sim and Gerhard are on full display, their tandem improvements in their visual art apparent from issue to issue, from book to book, neither content to remain where they were, instead pushing to the next level, reaching for the next skill, violating the next orthodoxy.)

The visual side of the book, which I've barely touched on here, is the *raison d'être* for the restoration work done on this volume. I've restored the art from scans of the original art boards, print copies, and the original photo negatives, using the best available sources on a per-page basis, and combining them in some cases, to create the best versions of the pages possible. This effort, which has resulted in a better-looking book than ever before, is wholly due to Sim's continuing engagement with and ownership of his own work, and the patronage of his loyal fans. It is no exaggeration to say that this work would never happen under a traditional publishing arrangement, in which the printed work itself is nothing more than a cross-platform widget designed to sell lunch boxes, movies, or buttons. One only has to look at the print fate of a certain duck to see the truth of this assertion.

— Sean Michael Robinson
San Diego, CA
April 2017

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In preparing this new edition, we are indebted to the generous Cerebus art collectors who contributed scans of their artwork for this project. To contribute your own original artwork to the Cerebus Archive, please contact Sean at cerebusarthunt@gmail.com. Dave has created a finder's certificate that will be sent to every contributor for each page contributed to the art hunt, as well as to anyone sending a lead that results in the netting of a new page.

Justin Eisinger, IDW Publishing –

pg. 245 (Cerebus no. 198 pg. 19)

Margaret Liss–

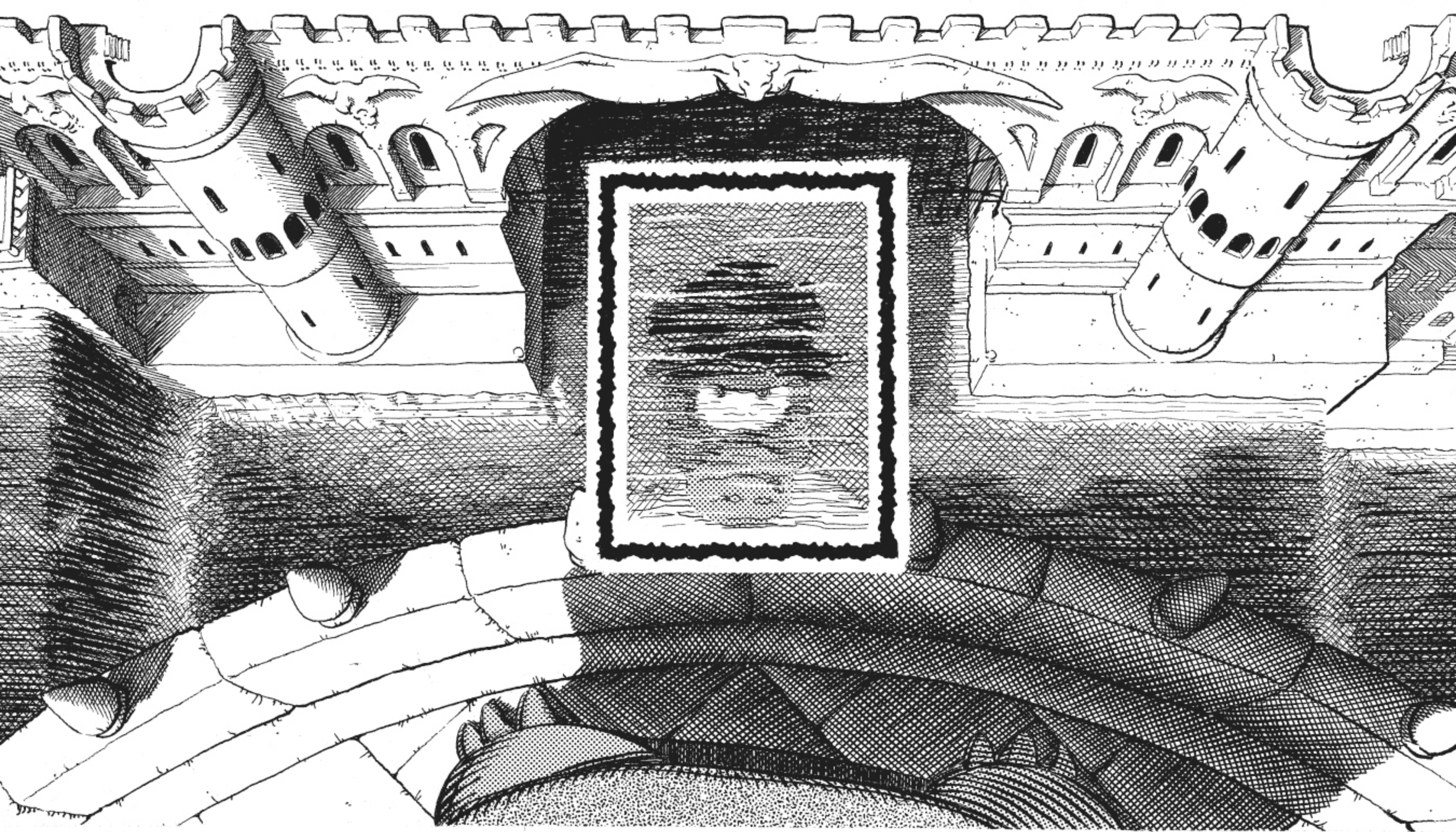
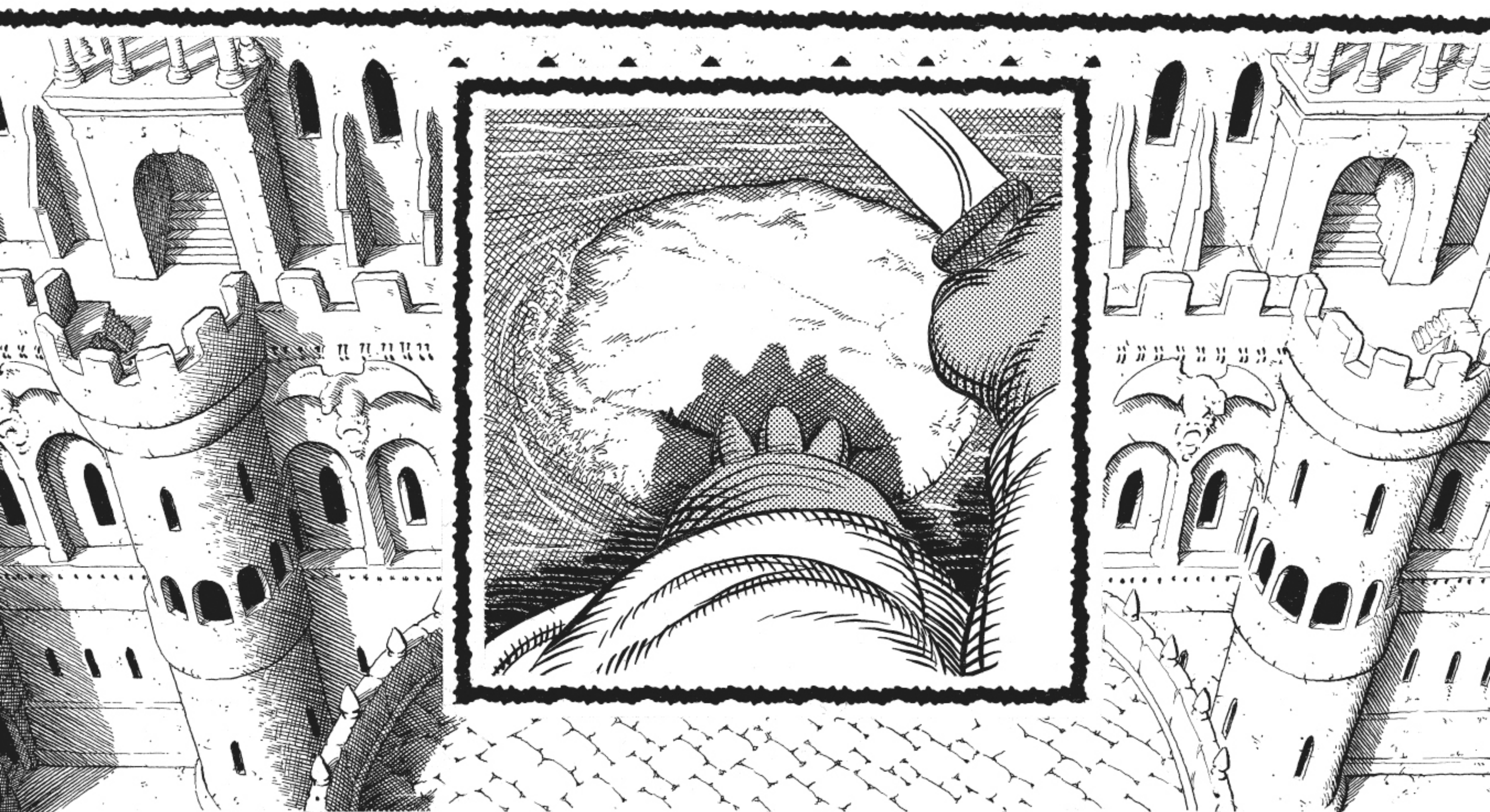
pg. 204 (Cerebus no. 196 pg. 18)

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